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ISLAND IN THE SUN: The glass squash court, first erected in front of the Pyramids, has been moved to an equally spectacular setting, an island in the Red Sea, off Hurghada, much to the delight of players and spectators alike. "It's wonderful to play in a court surrounded by the sea, the mountains, the boats. Al-Ahram has done a great job and the Hurghada championship is just as successful as the Pyramids event," said top-ranked Australian player Sarah Fitz-Gerald. Tonight sees the semi-finals of the Al-Ahram Squash Tournament, tomorrow the finals. (see p.17)
photo: Hossam Diab

Limited magic

BASKING in the glow of his success in Iraq, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan offered to play a role in an Israeli troop withdrawal from Lebanon. Annan, however, admitted he was a "magician without tricks" when it came to Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, and conceded the primacy of ongoing US mediation.

Following talks with Binyamin Netanyahu and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat on Tuesday, Annan welcomed an imminent decision by the Israeli cabinet to implement UN Resolution 425 concerning the withdrawal of Israeli troops from south Lebanon, adding he would work with all parties involved, including Syria, to ensure the effective implementation of the withdrawal, AP reported.

But Annan's visit to Israel ran into problems yesterday when the Knesset greeted him with a searing attack on UN policies towards Israel.

End sanctions

ARAB League foreign ministers called on the UN Security Council to freeze the six-year-old sanctions on Libya pending a verdict from the World Court.

A copy of the resolution, obtained by AFP, backed demands by Libya for compensation for losses it sustained as a result of the sanctions and reaffirmed solidarity with Tripoli.

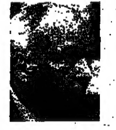
The resolution was adopted as the foreign ministers prepared yesterday to wrap up two days of discussions in Cairo marked by sharp criticism of Israel's policies in the Middle East peace process. (see p.4)

Probe refused

ARAB-Israeli lawmaker Azmi Bishara said he would invoke parliamentary immunity and refuse to be questioned by police about a visit to Syria last December during which he met with government officials and gave lectures.

Bishara's assistant told Reuters on Tuesday the investigation was politically motivated. Bishara had refused a request from Binyamin Netanyahu's office to meet with an aide before the visit. Bishara is not the first Israeli-Arab legislator to visit Syria. Several others have visited in recent years without incident. A Knesset committee could vote to drop Bishara's immunity.

INSIDE







America's bitter fruit

Dennis Ross arrives in Israel today to push the much vaunted American initiative to unlock the peace process. **Graham Usher** examines the likely results

Since the onset of the present crisis in March 1997, Palestinian President Yasser Arafat has tried to internationalise the Oslo process, hoping that the Arabs, the Europeans and the world generally would bring enough pressure to bear on the Netanyahu government to force it to adhere to signed agreements.

The fruit of this strategy became evident over the last week with trips to the region by Britain's Foreign Secretary Robin Cook (whose country currently holds the presidency of the European Union) and UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. The fruit has turned out to be a little bitter.

In their contrasting ways, both Cook and Annan made it clear to the Palestinian Authority (PA) that the only "mediator" for the Oslo process is the US and that both support the US's latest initiative to "unblock" it. The American proposal currently has the status of a "non-paper" (meaning that it has yet to be submitted formally or published), but its general outline is known.

The US wants Israel to undertake a West Bank redeployment of 13.1 per cent, spread over three four-week stages, in exchange for specific security measures undertaken by the Palestinian Authority (PA). Given the international forces backing it, it is an offer that Yasser Arafat is going to find very difficult to refuse, despite falling a long way short of even the most minimal Palestinian aspirations. If Arafat has yet to have to decide on the matter, it is because Binyamin Netanyahu is deciding for him.

On 22 March, all but one of the Israeli cabinet rejected the unpublished American proposal on the grounds that it would "compromise Israel's vital security interests". Israel has yet to determine how much land it will yield for the next redeployment, but the cabinet consensus appears to be 9.5 per cent and no more.

So alarmed was Netanyahu by the American proposal that he dispatched cabinet ministers Nathan Sharansky, Limor Livnat and Yitzak Mordechai to Washington to urge administration officials not to go public with it. He has also, say Israeli press sources, mobilised "Israel's friends in Congress" to put the squeeze on the Clinton administration to prevent publication. The US (for now) appears to have backed off, agreeing to postpone any public announcement of the initiative until after US special envoy Dennis Ross's trip to Israel, due to start today.

The US government seems genuinely shocked by the ferocity of Netanyahu's opposition to its plan, especially, as one US official told Israeli Radio, "as the 13 per cent proposal is much closer to the Israeli position than it is to the Palestinian". This is an understatement.

Although details of the plan have yet to be officially revealed, on 20 March Israel's *Yediot Aharonot* newspaper leaked what it said was the "draft" of the American proposal. It shows that while Israel would redeploy from 13.1 per cent of the West Bank's Area C (currently under Israel's exclusive control), most of this land (about 17 per cent) would be transferred to the West Bank's Area B (under the PA's civilian but Israel's security control) rather than to Area A (under the PA's civilian and security control). By way of "compensation" to the Palestinians, Israel would convert around 12 per cent of what is presently Area B territory into Area A.

Furthermore, each stage of the redeployment would be conditional on the PA implementing a specific security pledge, effectively consecrating Netanyahu's notion of "reciprocity" as the motor of the Oslo process. Thus, in exchange for an initial Israeli redeployment of two per cent, the PA would be expected to issue an order banning "incitement" in Palestinian areas, investigate — with the Israelis — any incidents of incitement and ratify the annulment of those clauses of the Palestinian National Charter which assume the destruction of Israel. Should the PA not do these to Israel's satisfaction, then presumably the redeployment would stop.

Finally — and presumably to spare Netanyahu blushes with his coalition — the American proposal makes no call for any kind of freeze on settlement construction. Rather, according to a report in Israel's *Ha'aretz* newspaper on 23 March, Israel would make a written commitment to either the US or Jordan to "significantly reduce settlement activity" while the US and PA would set up a joint committee to "monitor settlement activity and land expropriations in the West Bank".

The one area where it appears the US has not moved towards Israel is over the third redeployment, guaranteed by then Secretary of State Warren Christopher in the 1997 Hebron agreement to take place "not later than mid-1998". Netanyahu has long wanted this redeployment cancelled or "collapsed" into Oslo's final status negotiations on borders. And it may be that the Israeli leader is playing tough on the current US initiative to extract more concessions on the third redeployment.

Is the American initiative one the PA can accept? There are signs that it may, partly out of a desire to keep the US sweet on the third redeployment and partly out of resignation that 13 per cent is the most it can salvage from the second. There is also a sense that any outright rejection would alienate the Americans (and perhaps the Europeans) and play into Netanyahu's hands. "We know Netanyahu would like it very much if Arafat were to reject the American initiative," chief PLO negotiator Saeb Erekat told Israel's Channel 2. "But we will not give him (Netanyahu) the pleasure."

Yet to accept the initiative would mean the PA entering the final status talks with no more than 15 per cent of the West Bank under its civilian and security control, no freeze on settlements and facing an Israeli leader who would undoubtedly use these gains as evidence that playing hard ball with the Arabs (and the Americans) brings political and territorial dividends. If this is victory, it is difficult to see what is defeat.

(see p.5)

Civilised meetings

The world's largest-ever gathering of intellectuals meets in Stockholm on Monday. Their aim? To reshape cultural cooperation between North and South. **Omayma Abdel-Latif** reports

Will we be able to preserve our cultural identity in an age of globalisation or are we destined to be "Westernised"? How do the peoples of the world relate to one another and to human kind as a whole?

These are just two of the questions which will be debated at a four-day UNESCO-sponsored conference, the largest-ever event of its kind, which will open in Stockholm on Monday.

Representatives of some 150 countries will seek new channels for inter-cultural dialogue between North and South as well as try to forge a new understanding of the role of religion in shaping cultural policies.

The conference, entitled "The Power of Culture", is the climax to the World Decade for Cultural Development, which began in 1988. Participants will draw up a schedule of events for the year 2000, which has been declared by the UN General Assembly the "International Year for the Culture of Peace" — a concept that includes and champions the fact of cultural diversity.

"At a time when the world has become familiar with terms such as ethnic cleansing, religious fanaticism, social and racial prejudices and theories about the clash of cultures, it is essential to change the cultural landscaping of the world," Mohamed Ghoneim, first under-secretary at the Ministry of Culture, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

Ghoneim is orchestrating the Egyptian contribution to the conference and will be a member of the delegation to Stockholm, led by Culture Minister Farouk Hosni.

The conference will tackle key cultural issues such as the fate of local cultures in the era of globalisation, the search for identity, cultural and linguistic diversity, and what one Third World intellectual has dubbed the "cyber-space culture".

"Some may think that globalisation links cultures more closely and enriches the interactions between them," said an Egyptian intellectual. "But it also threatens the diversity of creativity and may eventually lead to a progressive uniformity."

In addition to plenary sessions, there will be ten forums. Egypt has been chosen to chair the forum debating "international cooperation in cultural policies."

According to Hosni, Egypt was chosen to organise these important debates because of its cultural weight.

There will also be agoras organised by NGOs, consisting of workshops and seminars to discuss new initiatives as well as ongoing projects.

Some intellectuals have expressed the fear that, like many UN gatherings, the conference may adopt a Western agenda and fail to address Third World problems.

Ahmed Youssef, a political science professor, cited the problem of minorities as an example. "They address this problem from a Western perspective, while the view from the Third World is to deal with minorities and ethnic groups within the perspective of one nation that has different cultures, but not different identities," he said.

Instead of dealing with what he called "irrelevant issues", Youssef said such a conference should work on reducing the gap between the information "haves" and "have nots". "The core challenge is to build a global information society that is built by all and accessible to all," he added.

Many Third World intellectuals have voiced concern that globalisation has hitherto meant a loss of identity. Although they wish to be part of modernity, they want to participate on terms which respect their own cultural traditions.

Political analyst Mohamed Sid-Ahmed says it is impossible to ignore either the "local" or the "global", and that a synthesis between the two has to be created. "Such a conference should seek new mechanisms for initiating a dialogue between cultures, instead of interpreting our cultural differences in terms of us-versus-them," he said.

History professor Ahmed Thabet used different words to make the same point. "Does globalisation show respect for cultural diversity and national specificity, or does it move towards imposing a certain cultural pattern, that of the West, and a certain lifestyle, that of America?" he asked.

According to one Western intellectual, the conference is simply an attempt on the part of the Western world "to frame a new social contract to counter the xenophobia in European societies towards non-European cultures, particularly the Islamic culture."

Like all UN conferences, the Stockholm plan of action advocates "respect for gender equality" and fully recognises women's rights, including freedom of expression and access to decision-making processes.

At a meeting in Tunis last month, the Arab Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (AESCO) introduced a number of modifications to the original plan of action. "These changes stress the importance of cultural diversity and the cultural rights of minorities within a national framework," Ghoneim said.

"The clash of civilisations theory advanced by Huntington is of no use," Youssef concluded. "The concept that must prevail is a meeting of civilisations. That is the real challenge facing the world's intellectuals when they meet in Stockholm."

Al-Ahram Weekly



President Mubarak during talks with the Emir of Qatar Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani



President Mubarak with the general secretariat of the Arab Journalists' Federation led by its Chairman Ibrahim Nafie

Southern warmth

Patching up differences with neighbours could be warmer on some fronts than others, as **Dina Ezzat** finds out

Cairo played host this week to guests from Turkey, Sudan and Qatar who worked with Egyptian officials on improving relations that had soured. The visitors were Turkish Foreign Minister Ismail Gem, Sudanese Foreign Minister Mustafa Osman Ismail and Emir of Qatar Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani. All three held separate talks with President Hosni Mubarak and Foreign Minister Amr Moussa.

With the Turkish official, Cairo reiterated concern over the controversial strategic military alliance between Ankara and Tel Aviv. Also on the agenda was Turkey's proposed Neighbourhood Forum initiative that aims to forge an alliance between Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. With economic cooperation its primary target, Ankara is trying to sell the idea as one designed to "help Iraq out of its economic crisis." But the authors of the initiative do not exclude some form of political and/or military cooperation between two or more members of the proposed forum.

With Sudan, Egypt worked out a plan for the return of Egyptian property in Khartoum which was confiscated by the Islamist regime in the past few years during which time the two countries exchanged recriminations. The plan is expected to be put into action within the next few days. The completion of the hand-over process, which should not take more than three weeks, may open the way for the much-talked about visit by Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir to Cairo. Also under discussion was Egypt's involvement in a mediation effort to reconcile Bashir's regime and its southern opponents in order to preserve Sudan's territorial integrity.

And with the ruler of Qatar, Cairo expressed dismay over the recent layoff of hundreds of Egyptians working in Doha in retaliation for Egypt's boycott of a regional economic conference hosted by the small Gulf state last year and attended by Israel. Cairo listened to promises that the situation would be rectified in a fashion that best serves bilateral relations as well as overall Arab interests.

In all, the results were satisfactory to Egypt as well as to the visiting dignitaries. The Turks said they were happy to establish a mechanism for regular consultations between Moussa and Gem and their assistants. The Sudanese said they were pleased with, and supportive of, the Egyptian mediation effort. And the Qataris said they were glad to have been warmly received by Egypt — a sign that the dispute of the past few months has been resolved.

But the rapprochement appeared to be warmer on some fronts than on others. Sudan seemed to come first while Qatar and Turkey vied for second place.

Following their talks at the Foreign Ministry, Moussa and his Sudanese opposite number came out laughing and exchanging jokes. Asked about the disputed Halayeb border triangle, Ismail said: "Halayeb should be a symbol of the integration between Egypt and Sudan. As my brother Moussa said, Sudan's borders extend to Egypt's northern borders and Egypt's borders extend to Sudan's southern borders."

According to the Sudanese foreign minister, "the two countries have overcome the difficult points in all areas and have embarked on an era of cooperation in security, political and economic domains."

Not as much warmth was in the air when it came to the Qataris. Indeed, there were no joint appearances by them and the Egyptians before the press.

Egypt did give the visiting ruler and his delegation a red carpet reception. Moussa made official statements welcoming the visit and underlined the need for close Arab ties. But Qatari Foreign Minister Hamid bin Jassim, who was behind most of the verbal assaults on the Egyptian people and government, kept a low profile and did not speak to reporters.

And any rapport that was demonstrated in a joint news conference by Moussa and Gem was cautious. Both ministers praised what they termed the good and honest talks they had, but every time Gem said the Ankara-Tel Aviv military cooperation was not a strategic alliance, Moussa came close to replying that he hoped that this was indeed the case. "It is not that we have an intention to reject what the [Turkish foreign] minister is saying. All I can say is that we are closely, carefully and constantly following that matter and all its developments that could have some strategic implications or an impact on the future of regional relations," Moussa said.

According to an Egyptian diplomat, "Egypt is being reconciliatory toward Turkey, but we cannot say that we really believe that their military cooperation with Israel is not a strategic alliance. On the one hand, we have information that suggests otherwise. On the other hand, Turkey has repeatedly refused to provide us with a copy of this agreement."

Egypt is also apprehensive about the Neighbourhood Forum initiative. "We don't have all the details of the initiative... and we are not addressed as neighbours in this initiative," said Moussa. He added that Egypt is not opposed to any economic cooperation among these countries. But, Moussa said, if things "go beyond the neighbourhood dealings, then we have an opinion and a stance" that is based on rejecting any regional alliances that may include military cooperation or cause political polarisation.

One diplomat explained: "What the Turks seem to want is to minimise the economic losses they suffered as a result of the sanctions imposed on Iraq. They also want to get both Syria and Iraq to control the Kurdish groups that are based on their territories."

The source added: "But what is most alarming is that they want to exclude Egypt from a major regional arrangement." The Turks, the source said, also expect countries like Syria and Iran to destroy any weapons of mass destruction they may have, irrespective of the nuclear arsenal in Israel's possession.

Diplomats say that Cairo does not want to act with hostility. Rather, it plans to listen to Turkey on the matter. However, the diplomats point out that there is a big difference between listening and condoning.

A Kuwait-Iraq reconciliation?

PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak met on Monday with the general secretariat of the Arab Journalists' Federation, led by Ibrahim Nafie, chairman of the federation and the *Al-Ahram* Organisation. Nafie told reporters that Mubarak spoke to the journalists about Arab issues, particularly reconciliation between Arab states.

According to Nafie, Mubarak said that if Iraq offered Kuwait a public apology for its 1990 invasion and agreed to release Kuwaiti prisoners, "this would be an important step toward a reconciliation" between the two countries.

Nafie said Mubarak explained Egypt's effort to avert an American military strike against Iraq that "would have added to the sufferings of the Iraqi people" and caused tension in the region. Nafie quoted Mubarak as saying that Iraq "exploded" Arab solidarity by invading Kuwait "but there is a difference between the 1990 situation and the situation now... The majority of Arab peoples opposed a military strike against Iraq to spare the Iraqi people additional suffering."

Nafie said that Mubarak was asked about Israel's conditional offer to withdraw from southern Lebanon. He said the problems along the Lebanese and Syrian tracks "should be solved simultaneously, but if Israel wishes to withdraw from Lebanon unconditionally, let it do so."

On the situation of the Egyptian press, Mubarak was quoted as saying there will be no new press laws. "What is required is action by the Press Syndicate and the Supreme Press Council to stop the trespasses that reflect on national unity or that are related to attempts at blackmail, threats and defamation," Mubarak was quoted as having said.

Putting out the fire

The Press Syndicate, acting to "put out the fire" ignited by the imprisonment of three journalists, is calling for the amendment of laws governing publication offences. **Shaden Shehab** reports

The Misdemeanour Appeals Court for Cairo's Al-Sayeda Zeinab district confirmed on 18 March a six-month prison sentence against Gamal Fahmi, managing editor of the weekly newspaper *Al-Destour*. The court found him guilty of slandering writer Tharwat Abaza in an article which he published in the weekly newspaper *Al-Arabi*, mouthpiece of the Nasserist Party. Fahmi, who was arrested last Sunday, had been initially sentenced by a lower court in March 1996. *Al-Destour* was shut down at the end of last month for publishing a dubious statement, containing threats against three Coptic businessmen, that was allegedly issued by the underground Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya.

Fahmi was the third journalist to receive an imprisonment sentence for libel in less than a month.

Shocked by the high incidence of prison sentences for libel offences, the Press Syndicate has moved to "put out the fire", according to Syndicate Chairman Makram Mohamed Ahmed.

On 24 February, an appeals court confirmed one-year prison sentences against Magdi Hussein, editor-in-chief of the bi-weekly *Al-Shaab*, mouthpiece of the Islamist-oriented Labour Party, and Mohamed Hilal, the newspaper's cartoonist. They were convicted of slandering Alaa El-Alfi, son of former Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi.

Ahmed is attempting to arrange out-of-court settlements between Abaza and Fahmi and also between Hussein and El-Alfi. If settlements were reached, the three journalists would be spared their prison sentences until the Court of Cassation rules on the matter.

"There is hope in Fahmi's case," Ahmed told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "I met both parties and they showed flexibility. Fahmi is ready to personally apologise to Abaza and print the apology in the newspaper. Abaza seemed willing to accept the offer but requested time to think it over."

"For the time being, we are trying to put Fahmi in the same ward with Hussein and Hilal, where they are kept separate from common criminals," said Ahmed. He added bitterly: "I hope the ward is large enough to accommodate a larger number of journalists because there are about 60 cases [before the courts] related to publication offences."

Ahmed noted that the imprisonment penalty for a publication offence was enacted into law several years ago. "It is astonishing that it is becoming excessively used by judges today," he said.

The syndicate will work to have the provisions related to imprisonment deleted from the press law, Ahmed said, "once we have put out the fire". He suggested that the appropriate penalty for a publication offence would be to strip any offender of his syndicate membership, thus denying him the right to work in journalism.

A syndicate disciplinary board is currently questioning Mamdouh Mahran, editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Al-Nabaa*, for publishing an article alleging that the wife of Hamdi Zaqzouq, minister of *Al-Awqaf* [religious endowments] was Jewish and that she ran the ministry's affairs from behind the scenes. The prosecutor-general also brought libel charges against Mahran.

The Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights (EOHR) expressed concern over Fahmi's imprisonment. "The EOHR's concern is accentuated by the fact that these rulings are made in a tense climate against the freedom of the press," a statement said.

President Mubarak had complained in a meeting with the Supreme Press Council about the "trespasses" of the press and said that some journalists had stepped out of line so far that their actions could pose a threat to press freedom. But he vowed that no restrictions would be imposed "other than those enshrined in law and in the conscience of the journalist."

One human rights movement for all?

A two-day conference was organised by Cairo and Harvard universities to probe the intricate and sometimes problematic relationship between Arab and Western human rights groups. **Fatemah Farag** samples the debate

Twenty years ago the term "human rights groups" almost automatically referred to international, Western-based organisations. Today, with the development of a diverse and widespread human rights movement in the Third World, the picture has become much more complex. A case in point is the Arab world, where a large number of national and regional human rights organisations have emerged in past years. The relationship between these groups and their "international" Western-based counterparts is often fraught with difficulties which need to be addressed. Hence, the initiative taken by the Human Rights Programme at Harvard University and the Centre for the Study of Developing Countries (CSDC) at Cairo University, who jointly organised a meeting under the heading: "The International Aspects of the Arab Human Rights Movement".

"The significance of this meeting is that it comes at an appropriate moment as the relations between Arab and international human rights movements is a cause of concern... If disagreement regarding certain issues is not resolved, doubts could be cast on the credibility of the organisations of both movements," said Mustafa Kamel El-Sayed, a professor of political science at Cairo University and CSDC director.

To ensure that the most controversial subjects could be addressed without reserve, the mode chosen for the discussions, which took place on 21 and 22 March, was informal, round-table closed sessions. As the summary of procedure explained, there would be "no effort in the meeting to achieve a consensus on the issues explored. No 'statement' will be issued ... no votes taken, no resolutions adopted."

According to Professor Henry Steiner, director of the Human Rights Programme of the Harvard Law School, "We all feel the need for better communication and the importance that criticisms from both sides be made clear. If the agenda of the West is not responsive, then we need to know that. We hope this initiative will start a series of similar talks."

The high-powered meeting included among its Egyptian participants Mohamed El-Sayed Said, deputy director of the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, Hani Shukrallah, managing editor of *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Bahieddin Hassan, director of the Cairo Centre for Human Rights, and Mohsen Awad, executive director of the Arab Human Rights Organisation.

There were also prominent members of human rights organisations from Kuwait, Morocco, Tunisia, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Sudan and Yemen. But Muncef Marzouki, former president of the Tunisian League for Human Rights, was unable to attend because he was not granted an exit visa by his country. Western-based NGO representatives included the executive director of Human Rights Watch, Hani Megally, as well as Emma Playfair, executive director of Interights, and Neil Hicks for the US-based Lawyers Committee for Human Rights.

Talking to *Al-Ahram Weekly* at the end of the two-day seminar, Harvard's Steiner asserted that "there is an enormous consensus" between the Arab and international human rights movements "regarding the basic covenants of human rights." He noted, however, that "the discrepancy in agendas arises only when discussing where to draw the line, so only marginal issues are questioned."

According to Cairo University's El-Sayed, Arab participants took the opportunity to air "the common perception in the Arab world that the international movement sometimes takes positions similar to those adopted by Western governments — for example with regard to the issue of minorities — while ignoring Israeli violations of national political rights as well as the deterioration, in some countries, of economic and social rights." Palestinian delegates pointed out that since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, some international human rights organisations have been focusing on that authority's violations of human rights in the self-rule territories, while giving less attention to the violations committed by the Israeli occupation. Western representatives countered that the Arab movement was too preoccupied with national issues.

Another crucial point brought to the table for discussion was the role and character of human rights groups. Politicisation versus professionalisation of the movement is an issue that has recently been the subject of heated debate in regional civil society circles. "We all recognise that human rights is a political action," explained El-Sayed, adding that "the meeting stressed the importance that [a human rights] agenda should be autonomous and not a mere reflection of certain institutions in the West simply because they [the Western institutions] have more resources or are based in stronger countries."

Emma Playfair of Interights pointed out that the Arab worries stem from the fact that many Western institutions were at times guilty of deciding what should and should not be done. "You have to keep in mind that 20 years ago, when there were very few national human rights organisations, the tradition was for Western-based institutions to come in and do the work and, of course, they had their own perspectives," she said. Playfair cited the example of Amnesty International which was used by many as a model. Today, Arab human rights groups are striving to impose their own identity and many argue that this can only be achieved by a strategy which connects these NGOs to the grassroots level. On the Western side, it seems that institutions have also become more sensitive to the need to adapt themselves to the growing indigenous human rights movement. "Today, there is an awareness of the need to restructure Western groups to complement the work of national groups and we can see, for example in the US, that the composition of policy-making staff is becoming more international. This, of course, influences the decisions which are being made. It is, however, an ongoing process," explained Playfair.

It is in this framework that there arises the ticklish issue of funding, the extent to which it is used by foreign institutions to impose an agenda and whether it results in the dependence of local NGOs on the Western-based organisations. Steiner admitted that donor agencies may have an "implicit agenda" but added, however, that it is up to local NGOs to insist on their own agenda and not be lured by easily obtainable funds.

Both sides of the debate agree that under the present circumstances there is a continuing need for cooperation and coordination. Perhaps the importance of the meeting to many of the participants was summed up most aptly by Playfair who said: "There is a common awareness that strategy needs to be developed together, and that we may disagree, but we should consult."

The proceedings of the meeting will be edited and Harvard will publish an English version while Cairo University will publish the Arabic text. "When published, the discussions which took place will provide a sound basis for better cooperation and will serve as a model for similar action in other regions," concluded El-Sayed.

Kikhia case turned down

A Cairo court has thrown out a case filed by the wife of a Libyan dissident blaming the Interior Ministry for his disappearance. **Khaled Dawoud** reports

Cairo's southern court on Saturday rejected a case brought by Bahaa El-Emary, wife of Libyan dissident Mansour El-Kikhia, alleging that the Interior Ministry was responsible for his mysterious disappearance while attending a human rights conference in Cairo in 1993.

The court said that "there was no evidence that the ministry was involved in the disappearance of El-Kikhia and no evidence that any crime was committed against him in Cairo."

El-Emary, who holds dual American-Syrian citizenship and resides in Washington, had demanded LE500,000 in compensation from the Interior Ministry for allegedly failing to protect her husband while in Cairo.

But the court said that there was "no evidence of negligence by the ministry and all the evidence brought by El-Kikhia's wife was circumstantial." It also ordered El-Emary to pay the legal costs of the case.

The *Washington Post* claimed late last year that Egyptian agents had abducted El-Kikhia and handed him over to Libya. The newspaper quoted unnamed Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officials as saying El-Kikhia was murdered in Libya in January 1994.

Egypt vehemently denied the charge, insisting that it had no role in his disappearance.

El-Kikhia served as Libya's foreign minister until he joined the opposition against Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi in the late 1970s.

Gaddafi also denied responsibility for El-Kikhia's disappearance, claiming that it was a plot by the CIA to distort Libya's image and damage its relations with Egypt.

El-Kikhia attended a meeting of the Arab Organisation of Human Rights in Cairo in November 1993 after which he disappeared from his hotel room.

El-Emary's lawyer, Adel Amin, said he would appeal the court's decision within 60 days, in accordance with Egyptian law.

El-Emary told Reuters in a telephone interview that she was not surprised by the court's decision because, she said, Egypt had denied from the beginning any involvement or responsibility. She said that she would continue to seek help from the US government.





Coptic MP slams expats

A Coptic MP has taken expatriate Copts to task for attempting to interfere in the domestic affairs of Christians

Edward Ghali El-Dahabi, a prominent lawyer and a member of the People's Assembly, has accused Coptic expatriates living in the United States of attempting to interfere in the internal affairs of Egyptian Christians and impose their will on them, reports Gamal Essam El-Din. Rejecting a move by a group of expatriates to organise a campaign against the alleged persecution of Copts, El-Dahabi said that Egyptians, both Muslims and Christians, are bound by "strong national unity that knows no discrimination."

In a statement delivered before the assembly on Monday, El-Dahabi affirmed that "those who are trying to incite foreigners to interfere in Egypt's internal affairs are, in fact, stabbing Copts in the heart."

El-Dahabi drew the assembly's attention to press reports that the US Congress planned to debate a new law opposing the religious persecution of minorities throughout the world. The law, he said, is expected to gain Congressional approval next month.

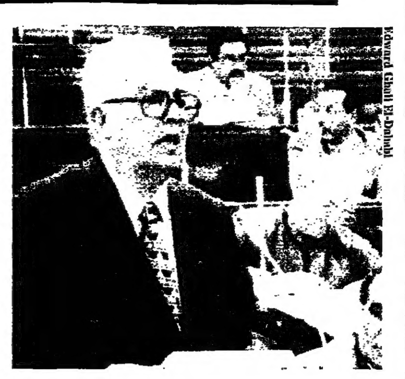
"I want to emphasise that what saddens Copts are these attempts to interfere in their affairs and being described as a minority," he said. "Egyptian Copts are ready to talk to those who wish to talk to them. If they have some demands or face some problems, they have to raise them, but only within the framework of national unity."

El-Dahabi, recalling the Muslim conquest of Egypt, said that it was the Arabs who saved Copts from religious persecution at the hands of the Romans. "Pope Benjamin, the Coptic patriarch at the time, had to live as a fugitive for 12 years. It was the Muslims who called him back when Egypt began to exercise national unity and renounce religious discrimination. This explains why Muslims and Copts have always been united in confronting the invaders of Egypt throughout the ages," said El-Dahabi.

He dismissed claims by Coptic expatriates that Copts are prevented from taking high posts. "Personally, I occupied the highest positions in the judicial system and my Christian faith was never an obstacle," El-Dahabi said.

"Let me emphasise again that Islam is a religion of justice, mercy and total equality between all human beings, regardless of their colour, race or religion," El-Dahabi added. He cited a statement by Lord Cromer, the British high commissioner at the beginning of this century. El-Dahabi quoted Cromer as having said, "There is no difference between Muslims and non-Muslims in Egypt except that Muslims pray in mosques and Christians pray in churches."

El-Dahabi also quoted Pope Shenoudah III, head of the Coptic Orthodox Church, as saying, "We are Egyptians, forming a part of the people of Egypt. We neither call ourselves a minority nor do we like others to call us a minority."


Edward Ghali El-Dahabi

MPs debate tourism industry's 'nightmare'

A heated debate in a parliamentary committee showed that additional measures are needed to revive the tourism industry, which was crippled by last November's Luxor massacre. **Gamal Essam El-Din** attended

A large number of tourism entrepreneurs, consultants and experts joined a meeting of the People's Assembly's tourism and economic affairs committee last Sunday to review the measures taken by the government to deal with the devastating effects of last November's Luxor massacre on the tourism industry. The meeting, held at the request of Kamal Abul-Kheir, tourism entrepreneur and MP for Gharbiya, produced a near-consensus that government measures to date were not adequate and that additional action is needed.

Abul-Kheir recalled that the cabinet, at a meeting on 1 December, had taken 11 measures to soften the blow dealt by the massacre to the tourism industry. These included a three-month exemption from taxes, interest on bank loans and a number of fees levied on tourist villages and hotels. They also included a one-year exemption from the payment of employees' social insurance fees.

According to Abul-Kheir, most of these measures have not been implemented. "Let me tell you frankly that they remain ink on paper," he said.

Joining forces with Abul-Kheir, Ilhami El-Zayyat, chairman of the Chamber of Tourism Companies, said the Luxor massacre had been the greatest disaster ever to befall the tourism industry. "In the past, the Egyptian tourism sector recovered quickly from several catastrophes, including the hijacking of the Italian ship Achille Lauro, the Central Security Forces riots and the 1991 Gulf War," he said. "But the Luxor massacre was the worst tragedy of all. The tourism industry has been living a nightmare for the past four months. The occupancy rates in hotels are almost zero and prices are declining all the time because supply greatly exceeds demand. There are 250,000 hotel rooms right now and an additional 100,000 will be added by the year 2000. At the Cairo Inter-Continental, one night's accommodation costs $24 compared to $49 at the Beirut InterContinental. One night in a five-star tourist village in Hurghada costs a mere $5."

El-Zayyat sharply criticised the cabinet measures taken in December. "These measures were taken hastily and without consulting tourism experts," he said. "For instance, the decision to offer a 50 per cent discount on EgyptAir tickets was not a sound one. The national carrier should always be run on an economic basis. Reducing fares could never lead to the promotion of tourism. Moreover, bank managers informed us that they would neither be able to postpone the repayment of instalments on our loans nor exempt us from interest on these loans. They told us that this money belonged to the citizens who had deposited it."

However, El-Zayyat did praise the efforts made by the tourism and foreign ministries to help the tourism industry ride out the damaging effects of the Luxor massacre. "The ministries have recently contracted a specialised American public relations firm to promote Egypt as a tourist destination throughout Europe and North America," he said. "Moreover, they have summoned a number of international security experts to map out an anti-terrorism strategy. These experts include Douglas Hurd, the former British Foreign Secretary, who has experience in dealing with the Irish Republican Army, the personal guard of the late French President Franceois Mitterrand, a famous German expert who saved a Lufthansa plane from hijacking, and an Italian senator who has experience in confronting Mafia operations."

Gihad El-Ghazali, a tourism consultant, also painted a bleak picture of the situation of the tourism industry. His prediction was that two years must pass before business picks up again. "The financial crisis in the Southeast Asian states has also added to these damaging effects," he said. "And the countries whose nationals were killed in Luxor are strongly opposed to Egypt as a tourist destination. For example, tour operators in Switzerland, the country that lost the largest number of nationals at Luxor, refuse to cooperate unless they are given a copy of the report on the police investigation and unless their government agrees to waive a warning to its citizens against visiting Egypt. They have even alleged that the personal belongings of their victims were stolen and insist that these belongings should be returned before they agree to persuade any Swiss citizen to visit Egypt again."

Rejecting the allegation, Hussein Badran, chairman of the Tourism Promotion Authority, insisted that the personal belongings of the victims were not stolen. "All their belongings were handed back to their families. It is really surprising to hear this allegation four months after the event," Badran said.

The allegation created an uproar in the committee. Many of its members argued that the allegation was part of a "Zionist campaign" to defame Egypt.

The parliamentarians were sympathetic to the grievances of the tourism entrepreneurs. Ahmed Abu Heggi, an MP for Sohag, blamed the government for the bleak situation. "The government is mainly responsible, because it has never been able to forge an effective anti-terrorism strategy," he said. "The tourism sector, which plays a crucial role in development and creating employment opportunities, is now paying a very high price for the lack of such a strategy."

Said El-Alfi, an MP for Sharkiya, responded that the government should not be blamed for all kinds of catastrophes, be they natural or man-made, especially in an age of liberalisation and privatisation.

At the meeting's end, both parliamentarians and tourism investors were urging the government to take urgent new measures to save the industry from bankruptcy. These, they said, should include exempting hotels from sales tax, turning short-term bank loans into long-term loans, issuing Egyptian insurance policies to all tourists, and establishing a special bank for the promotion of tourism as well as a fund for dealing with "tourism disasters."

'The death of time'

The world is shrinking again, thanks to 'excessive speed'. **Ayman George** makes a brief pit-stop on the virtual highway


Atef Ebeid   Hisham El-Sherif

CAINET '98 was the title of the Third Internet Conference and Exhibition held on 22-24 March at the Marriott Hotel, organised by the Internet Society of Egypt, the Regional Information Technology and Software Engineering Centre and the Regional Information Technology Institute.

Addressing the gathering, Atef Ebeid, minister of the public business sector, said that the government was the first to introduce Internet services in 1993. Companies and individuals soon followed suit. In 1996, the government gave permission to private companies to market such services. At present, there are 36 companies, including 22 in Cairo. The others are based in five provinces in Upper Egypt, and elsewhere outside the capital. Together, they provide services to more than 80,000 subscribers.

According to Ebeid, the government's objective is to see maximum use of the Internet, not only in the major cities and organisations, but also by small enterprises and "those who wish to have it but cannot afford it."

Ebeid was followed by Hisham El-Sherif, head of the cabinet's information and decision-support centre and chairman of the Internet Society of Egypt, who said the government was currently implementing a plan to make the service available to all sectors of society. The number of international connection lines has been trebled during the past year, he said.

El-Sherif explained that one of the conference's objectives was to debate how to make best use of the Internet in the field of education, particularly the education of children. Another objective was to open channels for cooperation with international organisations with the aim of transferring technology and know-how to Egypt.

A panel discussion, chaired by columnist Salah Montasser, also debated how the Internet could help the Egyptian press enter the era of globalisation.

Tarek Kamel, director of communications at the cabinet's information and decision-support centre, said the conference also discussed the uses of Internet-2, which enables extremely rapid transfer of information.

Ahmed Abdel-Rahman, deputy chairman of the Internet Society of Egypt, predicted that the coming few years will witness what he called "the death of time." By this, he meant that information will be exchanged at excessive speed. "E-mail will be sent from Egypt to Australia in the space of seconds," he said. "Every country or enterprise without a site on the Internet will definitely stand to lose."

The Internet Society of Egypt was established in 1996.





Young environmentalists applauding the minister's initiative, above; and right, a bit of vital spadework *photos: Adel Ahmed*

The greening of Helwan

NADIA Makram Ebeid, minister of state for environmental affairs, planted a number of trees in Helwan last Sunday to kick off "environment week" in the southern suburb, reports Mahmoud Bakr. Ebeid said the ministry would devote great attention to improving ecological conditions in Helwan, which has suffered from pollutants for years, and restore it to its former status as an "oasis of healing and beauty."

A LE52 million plan for the sustainable development of the area will deal with the problems of industrial wastes and air pollutants and upgrade medical services for Helwan's inhabitants, she said.

The scheme, which is financed by Swiss aid, will be carried out jointly by the ministries of scientific research, military production, planning, environment and the public business sector.

Mahmoud El-Sherbini, chairman of a local environment society, said that 10,000 trees will be planted in the streets of Helwan during "environment week".

Police unfazed by Minya attacks

Acting possibly out of desperation, Islamist militants staged their first attacks in southern Egypt since the Luxor massacre. **Omayma Abdel-Latif** reports from Minya

After a lull of several months, Islamist militants went on the offensive again in southern Egypt, staging twin attacks last Sunday in Minya province, that left four policemen killed and 13 citizens injured. The attacks were the first since 17 November when 58 tourists and four Egyptians were killed by six assailants at the Hatshepsut Temple across the Nile from Luxor.

A security source said Sunday's attacks were the militants' response to the killing of eight of their number in two clashes with police during the previous two weeks. The attacks, he said, are a desperate attempt by the militants to prove that they still exist.

The first attack occurred at 6.45 pm on Sunday in the town of Beni-Mazaar when a police patrol car carrying Lt. Col. Alaa Qandil, two conscripts and the driver, approached a "suspicious" pick-up truck, in which four men were riding.

As the patrol car prepared to give chase to the truck, its occupants unleashed a hail of automatic rifle fire, that killed the four policemen on the spot. Two pedestrians, who happened to be in the area, were wounded.

As the gunmen escaped southward, they were confronted by a police checkpoint at the entrance to the village of Matay, 10 kms south of Beni-Mazaar. In the ensuing clash, four policemen and seven citizens suffered slight injuries. The attackers abandoned the truck and took refuge in a neighbouring plantation. Blood stains were found on the truck's seats, indicating that one of the attackers was wounded.

Police combed the plantation in search for the assailants.

A high-ranking security source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the attacks had not taken the security authorities by surprise. "We expect attacks to occur here and there," he said. "The fact that there have been no attacks for some time does not mean that we have shelved our plans to upgrade security measures."

The source explained that police have abandoned the shoot-to-kill policy. In two clashes on 8 and 18 March, he said, police besieged the militants' hideouts and asked them to surrender. "When they responded by opening fire, police fired back, killing them on the spot," the source added.

In the 8 March clash, four militants were killed in the Hor plantation, a village to the north of Mallawi. The four are believed to have been involved in an attack on a church in Abu-Qurqas, in March 1997, in which 12 Copts were killed, and also in the killing of 11 policemen in separate ambushes throughout the year.

On 18 March, police were tipped off that four militants were hiding in wheat fields at Tahnsha, south of Minya. Police encircled the area and used megaphones to urge the militants to surrender, but they opened fire, killing a policeman. Police fired back, killing the four militants.

"We are not the first to open fire," the source said. "We ask them to surrender first. If they open fire, we fire back, of course."

Despite Sunday's attack, there were obvious signs that the momentum of daily life had picked up again in Mallawi, previously a hotbed of terrorism.The town's main thoroughfare bustled with commercial activity and security measures were not as visible as in the past. A local lawyer said: "Until a few months ago, our good morning salute was to inquire who was killed the previous night and where the sound of the bullets came from. But now, the tension has eased off a lot."

A police car patrolled the street, which was thronged by villagers going about their daily activities. According to a trader in the *souq* [market], business was thriving again. The resumption of commercial activity was a top priority of the new policy.

"When the economic situation gets better and people feel that it is safe to work and walk the streets without being harassed by security forces, that is one way of fighting the militants," the source said.

He explained that previous security policies had failed to address the social tension which resulted from the police-militant confrontation. "The people were evidently disenchanted and this was reflected in their caution in dealing with the police," the source said. "But now we are introducing confidence-building measures between police and people."

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

Al-Ahram Weekly

Dreams deferred

Annan had one message for the hopeful Palestinians: do the Americans' bidding, writes **Graham Usher** from Jerusalem

Unlike Robin Cook's tempestuous sortie last week, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's visit to Gaza on Tuesday passed with barely a ripple. The nearest there was to a diplomatic incident was Israel's insistence that it, rather than the Palestinian Authority (PA), should receive Annan as he entered Gaza from the Rafah-Egypt crossing. This, in the laconic view of one UN official, was to demonstrate that "it is Israel, not the PA, that controls the international border." An eventual compromise was reached where Annan was greeted at Rafah by a Palestinian delegation accompanied by an Israeli Foreign Ministry official.

Fresh from his success in brokering the agreement with UN weapons inspections, Annan was granted regal treatment in Gaza, with a full military guard of honour as he arrived at the PA presidential offices. But there was one segment of the Palestinian people on hand to remind the secretary-general that Gaza remains very much an occupied territory. Around 200 mothers of the 3,000 or so Palestinian prisoners still incarcerated inside Israeli jails staged a sit-in as Annan's motorcade swept past. One banner expressed the sentiment of all. "There can be no peace or security without the release of Palestinian and Arab prisoners from Israeli jails," it read.

Yasser Arafat, too, was eager to use Annan's visit to ram home the point that UN Security Council resolutions apply to Israel as well as Iraq but that "Israel ignores them". He urged Annan "to push forward the peace process as you succeeded in your mission in Baghdad." But Annan was quick to put a lid on any "exaggerated expectations" arising out of the success of his Iraq intervention. While he said he believed that "all Security Council resolutions are binding," the question of their implementation was determined, not by the secretary-general, but by the international will that governs him. "In the case of Iraq, the international community had been willing to enforce UN resolutions and use force. This is the difference between Iraq and here," said Annan pointedly.

Other than this, Annan's main political message to the Palestinians was the same as that conveyed by Cook: that the only mediator for the Oslo process was the Americans and that, instead of looking to the UN and European Union for separate initiatives, the PA should accept any American proposals as the only ones in town. "I urge all the parties concerned to work with them [the Americans] and to have the courage, the vision and the flexibility to make the kind of compromises that are required to move forward and implement agreements," said Annan.

He then proceeded with his tour, meeting Palestinian human rights activists, a delegation of prisoners' mothers and assorted UN officials. At a banquet attended by members of the Palestinian Legislative Council, Annan admitted that during his trip to the region he had "repeated expressions of doubt and scepticism about Israel's good faith" and that so far the Palestinian dream of self-determination "remains a dream deferred." But again, his counsel was that Oslo was the only track available. "Do not succumb to the ways of violence," he urged the Palestinian parliamentarians. "Only peace and only compromise, only the understanding that two peoples must live — and not die — side by side, will bring peace to this land and self-determination to your people," he said.

Perhaps the most practical message of the whole trip was Annan's support for UNRWA, the UN agency responsible for Palestine's 3.1 million refugees, including the 674,000 who live in eight camps in Gaza. Aware that UNRWA is facing a projected deficit of $80,000 in its regular deficit this year which, if not met, could lead to catastrophic cuts in refugee services, Annan said that he had "strongly urged leaders from all parts of the world to provide UNRWA with the means to effectively carry out its mission. UNRWA is simply too important to the future of the region to be neglected. It must be restored to full strength over time."

It was probably this sentiment — more than any other expressed during his tour — which accounted for the warmth with which Annan was received when he visited Gaza's Jabalyia refugee camp, home to some 70,000 refugees and birthplace of the Intifada. Coupled with UNRWA Commissioner-General Peter Hansen's statement earlier this month that the agency's mandate would be renewed for three more years when it comes to a formal end in 1999, Annan's presence gave some hope to refugees that, while their services may be cut, their cause of return and compensation has not, yet, been abandoned.



UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and his wife receive flowers from Palestinian children during their visit to a boys' school in the Jabalia refugee camp in Gaza this week (photo: AFP)

Iraq's press: depressing and depressed

The Iraqi press, for many years a victim of authoritarianism, is also suffering from the effects of sanctions. **Khaled Dawoud** sampled the Iraqi press during a recent visit to Baghdad

Nearly all newspapers in Iraq look the same. As President Saddam Hussein makes few public appearances, a front-page file photo of the president is a must — accompanied by a quote from one of his old or recent speeches in which he usually calls upon Iraqis to remain united and firm in their resistance to the United States.

On normal days, the picture would be that of Saddam in civilian clothes, with a broad smile, while sitting on a sumptuous sofa in one of the many presidential palaces Washington wants to inspect. At other times, he is seen in military fatigues, surrounded by comrades, and still on other occasions, holding a child or drinking Arabian coffee while wearing traditional Bedouin clothing. And on Friday, there is the inevitable picture of Saddam, praying alone, looking pious.

The only exception is the newspaper *Babel*, run by Saddam's son, Uday. *Babel*, of course, does not criticise Saddam himself. But it has more freedom to criticise officials and the performance of government bodies. It is also the top newspaper in terms of getting interviews with key officials.

Contrary to other Iraqi newspapers, *Babel* runs mostly news items taken from news agencies, mentioning the source, the date and the exact time the news report arrived. Other papers, such as *Al-Jumhuriya*, *Al-Thawra*, *Al-Qadisia* and *Iraq* give more space to editorials and analysis.

Each paper has historically been affiliated to one of the ruling establishments in Iraq: *Al-Qadisia* is the armed forces paper, *Al-Thawra* is run by the ruling Baath Party, *Al-Jumhuriya* is affiliated to the presidency and *Iraq* gives more space to issues related to the Kurdish minority and covers activities of Kurdish factions which are, of course, loyal to Saddam Hussein.

Besides being board chairman of *Babel*, Uday is also the head of the Journalists' Syndicate, the Youth Television Channel and Iraq's national football team. The assassination attempt against Uday last year only added to his prestige — and posts.

Iraqi newspapers, like everything else in Iraq, were affected by the tight seven-year-old UN economic sanctions. Because of the high cost of paper, all newspapers had to reduce their size to only eight tabloid pages. Iraq is also prevented from importing any printing chemicals, for fear that such chemicals would be used to produce weapons of mass destruction, according to the Sanctions Committee.

Under an agreement among the newspapers' editors, each daily paper prints in broadsheet once a week, using eight pages only. Moreover, each newspaper has to take a day off each week. A paper like *Al-Jumhuriya*, for example, had to reduce its daily circulation from 400,000 copies in 1990 to 15,000 copies at present. Other papers had to stop devoting space to culture, the arts and sports, giving priority only to political news.

There are weekly papers and other tabloids which publish sensational news: hot pictures of actresses, crime and non-political gossip.

Iraqi newspapers cannot afford to subscribe to news agencies so they depend mainly on the official Iraqi news agency INA for their international news. Many Iraqis, suffering harsh living conditions, would say that they prefer to save their money and buy a sandwich or necessary goods instead of newspapers.

When Iraqi television tried to initiate its own satellite channel, similar to those of most Arab countries, the UN Sanctions Committee stopped the deal. According to Iraqi officials, all arrangements had been made to launch the channel last year after signing an agreement with a Turkish company. "They want to keep us in a cage," said one Iraqi journalist.

Because Iraq cannot afford buying any new television programmes, whether films, documentaries or major sports events, the option is simple. Iraq's two television channels record whatever material they want from other satellite channels. The programmes are picked up by the large dish on top of the television building and rebroadcast after Iraqi logos are superimposed at the top of the screen. If Iraq is being condemned and punished for all sorts of crimes, failing to respect broadcasting rights is the last thing Iraq would fear.

Sympathy but no action

Lebanese officials were disappointed by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's visit to Lebanon, as he declined to back their demand for an unconditional Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon in public. **Zeina Khodr** reports from Beirut

While opening a new office for the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in downtown Beirut, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan paid tribute to the achievements of the Lebanese people and government. But he also implicitly told the Lebanese to rely on themselves.

"I would like to recall a visit made to Beirut in 1958 by one of my predecessors, Dag Hammarskjold. It was a time when Lebanon was on the brink of civil war. He had lunch with then Prime Minister Sami El-Solh. A cake was brought in bearing the inscription: 'UN save Lebanon'. The UN head responded loudly so the press would hear. He said: I cannot accept this because it is for Lebanon to save Lebanon," Annan told a crowd of dignitaries who had gathered at the ESCWA building.

That message, observers believe, underscored what Lebanese officials had feared: the UN's inability — or unwillingness — to bring effective pressure to bear on Israel. Annan, whose visit to Beirut was part of a nine-day regional tour, discussed with Lebanese officials UN Resolution 425 and Israel's offer to withdraw its troops from south Lebanon on condition security guarantees are provided by the Beirut government.

Lebanon had hoped Annan would help push for the implementation of Resolution 425 — which calls on Israel to withdraw unconditionally from Lebanese territories. While supporting the resolution's implementation, the UN secretary-general insisted it could only be achieved with the cooperation of all parties and that the details needed to be worked out between Lebanon and Israel.

"Of course the resolution has a role for the UN in facilitating the implementation, and now there seems to be a willingness to implement it, and we will need to look at that. The UN can encourage, can steer, can pressure... but without the cooperation of the parties, UNIFIL [the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon] and the UN cannot impose the resolution," Annan told a news conference in Naquora in occupied territory in south Lebanon.

The UN chief had visited UNIFIL's headquarters in the border village to pay tribute to the work of the peacekeepers. In a colourful ceremony, he laid a wreath on a cenotaph in memory of the 230 soldiers killed in the line of duty since UNIFIL was deployed in the area in 1978.

"You have come at a very interesting but equally critical juncture in the history of the force," UNIFIL's commander Major General Joiji Konorote told the UN chief. "Recently a lot of attention has been focused on UNIFIL because of the interested parties' interpretations, perceptions and speculations and plans on how Resolution 425 should be implemented."

Annan discussed with UNIFIL officials "what the future may hold". After talks with Lebanese leaders, he made clear he had no intention of taking on Washington's role as mediator. While he had no proposal to end the Israeli occupation in the south, Annan said he would be discussing the matter when he arrives in Tel Aviv.

"We did go over Resolution 425 and its possible implementation, but there are two parties needed for this and it is not [Lebanese Foreign Minister Fares] Boueiz alone who can say what we are going to do," Annan told reporters after talks with Boueiz. "I will be holding talks with Israeli leaders to hear their point of view."

The secretary-general said private discussions with the two sides were needed to define the modalities of a pullout. He refused to give details, but stressed that "the resolution clearly states what Israel should do and what Lebanon should do and we need to look at the facts on the ground and the realities of today."

But the secretary-general later denied that he would advocate amending the resolution. In the absence of an explicit call for Israel to leave the country without posing conditions, observers believe Annan failed to give Lebanon the public backing they were looking for.

Relatives of Lebanese detained in Israeli jails were also looking to Annan for help to secure the release of their loved ones. They converged at the airport upon his arrival, carrying protest banners. They denounced an Israeli supreme court decision to allow Israeli authorities to keep at least 10 Lebanese detainees — held without charge — as bargaining chips. The secretary-general promised to press for International Red Cross access to Israeli jails.

In Syria, Annan said leaders were sceptical about Israeli offers to withdraw from Lebanon. "Nobody in the region, especially in Lebanon and Syria, takes the offers by Israeli leaders seriously," said the official Syrian paper *Tishrin*. Lebanon and Syria have rebuffed the Israeli proposal as a media manoeuvre, a trap and a means to divert international attention from the deadlocked Israeli-Palestinian talks.

Annan's visit coincided with the 20th anniversary of UN Resolution 425. That resolution is now at the centre of debate. It has divided Israeli politicians, who are discussing two rival plans for withdrawing from south Lebanon. Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's so-called security cabinet discussed separate plans drawn up by Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai and Infrastructure Minister Ariel Sharon. "The decision to withdraw has been taken. The issue now is when and how," Israel's Deputy Prime Minister Moshe Katzav said. Mordechai's plan calls for a full withdrawal on condition that Beirut accepts certain security guarantees. The plan, reportedly backed by Netanyahu, also calls for an agreement with Lebanon to protect members of Israel's allied Lebanese militia.

The rival plan presented by Sharon proposes a unilateral phased withdrawal to be accompanied by clear warnings to Lebanon that any attack on Israeli interests from the abandoned zones would provoke severe retaliation including attacks on Lebanese infrastructure.

But Beirut remains adamant it is under no obligation to grant Israel security guarantees because the resolution calls for an unconditional pullback.

Foreign Ministry sources said Annan promised to contact the government if he found common ground between the Lebanese and Israeli stances over the withdrawal during his talks in Israel. But Annan is unlikely to bridge the gaps nor bring pressure to bear on either party. He has clearly stated that he has only limited capabilities as UN secretary-general. In the interim, officials here are warning of possible Israeli attacks intended to force Lebanon to accept Israeli conditions.

Arafat calls for concerted Arab pressure

Yasser Arafat urged Arabs to bury their differences and form a united front against Israel, **Rasha Saad** reports

In his speech at the opening of the Arab League foreign ministers' meeting on Tuesday, Palestinian President Yasser Arafat demanded a united Arab stance that could effectively pressure the international community to close ranks and force Israel to respect Security Council resolutions and agreements already signed with the Palestinians.

Arafat, acknowledging that current political differences among Arab states might make it difficult to convene a full Arab summit, proposed that a mini-summit of those countries directly involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict be held as soon as possible.

The Palestinian leader said that the Arabs' rejection of a military strike against Iraq and their success in pressing for a diplomatic solution to the crisis had created the potential for a successful Arab summit.

On the subject of Iraq, Arafat added that certain forces in Israel had sought to escalate the recent Iraqi crisis "for fear that a peaceful solution would allow the world's attention to turn once again to the [Middle East] peace process."

Arafat insisted that the present Israeli government of Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu "is trying to make the peace process a thing of the past." He added, "It is not only that nothing is progressing... The whole process is now in a state of retreat."

Arafat explained that under Israel's policy of collective punishment, including such measures as the continuous closure of self-rule areas, confiscation of land and demolition of houses, the living conditions of Palestinians had deteriorated to an unprecedented degree. "All these measures have pushed unemployment up to 63 per cent in Gaza and 46 per cent in the West Bank. Our daily losses have reached over $10 million," he said.

Demanding international protection for the Palestinian people, Arafat cited the latest "crime" committed by Israeli soldiers two weeks ago in which three Palestinian workers were shot dead near Hebron. Extremist Jewish settlers had also raided Palestinian houses in the Abu Sneina district of Hebron under the protection of Israeli soldiers, thus confirming the present government's contempt for the peace process. Arafat also noted the escalation in Israeli efforts to Judaise Jerusalem, both by building new settlements and by expanding those that exist already.

"The security of the Palestinian people is obviously being threatened. I place the cause of the Palestinian people before the international community, the Security Council, the two sponsors of the peace process [the US and Russia], that they may provide protection to our people against the constant aggression from both settlers and the occupying army... Without immediate Arab and international action, the peace process will not survive much longer."

Indeed, Arafat went further, warning that if Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people continued, "the peace process will be destroyed, leading the region into violence and instability."

Arafat thanked the European Union for its "constant initiatives". He expressed his gratitude to British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook, "who spoke out in Jebel Abu Ghneim against Israeli settlement policy, Israeli policy on Jerusalem and the whole Israeli attitude to the peace process."

Arafat also called on the US to press ahead with its new initiative, "so as to prevent further deterioration in the peace process and protect it from Israeli arrogance and procrastination."

Later, Arafat met with the Arab foreign ministers for 90 minutes in closed session to go over these recent developments in more detail.

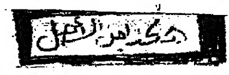
In his speech, Arab League Secretary-General Esmat Abdel-Meguid also tackled the issues of Arab reconciliation and the peace process. The latest crisis between Iraq and the US underscored the importance of restoring Arab solidarity and overcoming the divisions which had resulted from the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, Abdel-Meguid said.

Abdel-Meguid criticised the Israeli proposal to withdraw from southern Lebanon in return for security guarantees. He described the proposal as an attempt to subvert Security Council Resolution 425, divert attention from Israel's deliberate obstruction of the peace process and drive a wedge between Syria and Lebanon.

Abdel-Meguid also called on the US to consider the dangers inherent in the current stalemate. This situation, he said, "has led the Arabs to lose confidence in the present Israeli government, and has triggered their anger at the double standards used in dealing with the Palestinian question." He added, "We call upon the US to bring more effective pressure to bear on Israel to abide by its commitments."

Moving to Iranian-Arab relations, Abdel-Meguid described the recent moves by Iran to establish good relations with the Arabs as a "positive and constructive sign". However, he asked Iran to settle its dispute with the United Arab Emirates over three Gulf islands through direct negotiations, in order to allow further improvement in Arab-Iranian ties.

The Arab League foreign ministers concluded their meeting yesterday with several statements on the Arab-Israeli peace process, the situation in south Lebanon, UN sanctions against Libya, the Syrian Golan Heights and means of restoring Arab solidarity. The ministers confirmed their commitment to an earlier decision linking normalisation of ties with Israel to progress in the peace process. But no specific measures were mentioned which might increase Arab pressure on Israel to honour its agreements.





In this three-part report, **Khaled Dawoud** travels through the occupied Palestinian territories, where he finds few signs of way out of the present impasse



Since Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu came to power, clahses between the Israeli army and Palestinans have become nearly a daily event. The hardline policies of the right-wing premier are pushing Palestinians to the verge of an explosion, and perhaps a new intifada in which stones might not be the only wepon used to resist occupation *(photo: Reuters)*

Time for the bullet of mercy?

Whether in Gaza, the West Bank or Jerusalem, the general atmosphere among Palestinian officials and people is one of depression and frustration. The hope for peace is nearly dead, and the blame is being laid squarely at the door of Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu

Optimists among Palestinian officials tend to say that the peace process "is facing a crucial impasse which may have dangerous consequences". The "realists", however, are much more blunt: either "the peace process is dead", or at least, "it is slipping through our fingers like sand".

Nearly five years after signing the Oslo Accords in September 1993, Palestinians and Israelis ought by now to have reached the final settlement negotiations. But the reality is that Israel has failed to honour most of its obligations, and the majority of Palestinian land is still occupied by racist Israeli settlers. Following the election of right-wing Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu in June 1996, the situation has progressively and dramatically deteriorated. Peace was never a reality: now, even the idea of it is dying, not only for Palestinians who suffer daily abuse at the hands of the occupying Israeli troops, but also for the Israeli public. Their prime minister seems determined to plunge the whole region back into a world of confrontation, if not outright war.

Palestinians cannot travel, cannot work and have no hope for the future. Gaza has become a mini-state to which those living in the West Bank and Jerusalem cannot go without obtaining prior permission from the occupation authorities. "It is easier to go to the United States than to go to Gaza," said one citizen in the West Bank city of Jericho. Meanwhile, the expansion of settlements in the West Bank and Jerusalem is forging ahead, surrounding and suffocating all the small Palestinian towns and villages. Israel is also deliberately undermining Palestinian plans to create an independent state by building two sets of roads and byroads — one for settlers, another for everyone else — and reducing Palestinian cities and towns to tiny isolated Bantustans on the South African model, with no direct links between them.

Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, in an interview with a select group of Cairo-based foreign correspondents last week, said, "Netanyahu and his government refuse to implement accurately and honestly what we agreed on, even the agreements he signed himself in the presence of the Americans, Europeans and representatives of the whole world." Arafat was referring to the Hebron Accord, signed in January 1997. According to that agreement, Israel should have carried out three stages of further redeployment in the West Bank, the first in March 1997, the second in September and the last on the 7th of this month at the latest. None of these redeployments were implemented, and no progress is expected in the near future. Indeed, the majority of Palestinians now believe there can be no change as long as Netanyahu remains in power — which he is likely to do at least until the year 2000.

There is talk of a "new" — maybe even really new? — American initiative to be presented to both Israel and the Palestinians. Europe is also making moves, but Palestinian officials recognise that such moves will always be in coordination with Washington, and that the two will never risk open confrontation with one another. More than anything, Palestinians want to see Europe, together with the Arab and Muslim countries, use the cards in their hands (especially trade) to bring pressure to bear on Israel. The dialogue with peace-loving groups in Israel, they add, should not stop. But there has to be a direct and clear message to Netanyahu and his right-wing coalition partners that they cannot continue to cock a snook at the whole world without provoking a strong reaction.

Palestinian Minister of Local Administration and chief negotiator Saeb Erekat said, "We have a prime minister in Israel who is trying to close down all the options, to lower Palestinian expectations. He wants the Israeli public to see him as the prime minister who can keep the land and still make peace."

Erekat recognised that "there is a strong international will to continue the peace process. But this will is toothless. The international community is not about to try and force Netanyahu to implement the agreements just as they were signed, or to halt the building of settlements, confiscation of land and demolition of homes."

He added that the countries which co-sponsored and encouraged the Palestinians to move forward with the peace process should now fulfil their pledges to back them up should they run into trouble. "We did not invite the Americans, Russians, Norwegians, Egyptians and Jordanians along just for the photo-calls. We need them to speak out. Now, we feel very lonely."

Speaking as a negotiator, Erekat said that the trust level between Palestinians and Israelis has now fallen "below zero". That is why the Palestinians are insisting that a third party — the United States — should take part in any meetings between the two sides. "If I go as chief negotiator to speak with them alone, once we leave the room, they can distort the facts. Thus, I will not enter any room with an Israeli official without having a third party present."

But even the presence of a third party in the past did not guarantee the implementation of agreements. When US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was working hard to mobilise Arab support for a strike against Iraq, she probably thought that making a move on the Palestinian-Israeli track would help restore some of the credibility the US had lost. It was arranged that the Israeli and Palestinian sides would sign another "security agreement", as a first step towards reviving talks on other issues, particularly the redeployment of Israeli troops according to the Hebron Accord. An agreement was reached by top Israeli and Palestinian security officials and witnessed by Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officers in late December. But when the agreement went to Netanyahu, he refused to sign it because it stated that "both Palestinians and Israelis were committed to fighting terrorism, whether committed by Palestinians or Israelis."

"He did not want the term Palestinian to appear in any document. He also does not believe that Israel can produce terrorism," Erekat said. When the Palestinian official complained to the US Middle East peace envoy about Netanyahu's behaviour, the like of which would never have been tolerated from Arafat, Dennis Ross responded by saying, according to Erekat, "You have a point." "I told him, Mr Ross, I don't have a neon [light] over my head saying, 'Stupid'."

Faisal El-Husseini, another key Palestinian negotiator responsible for the Jerusalem file, confesses that negotiations with late Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and former Labour Prime Minister Shimon Peres were difficult, and that they themselves violated many provisions in the agreements signed between the two sides: "Rabin and Peres were very difficult negotiators. But this one [Netanyahu] is an impossible negotiator." He added that the Palestinians accepted the 1993 Oslo Accord as a compromise — an end to the zero-sum game where there could be only one winner and one loser. "We thought we both could gain from this compromise. Now, we cannot compromise the compromise," Husseini said. He added that Netanyahu does not recognise any of the principles on which the peace process was built, particularly the principle of land for peace.

"Now, instead of negotiating with us, he [Netanyahu] is dictating. Such behaviour has created a new situation in the region which has brought the peace process near to death and threatens the whole area with a future of violence and bloodshed. If he does not change his policy, we will reach this moment. And if they [the Likud government] are asking for it, they will get it," Husseini said.

Husseini particularly warned of the situation in Jerusalem, listing the many steps being taken by the Israeli occupation forces to empty the holy city of its Palestinian residents. Such measures include closing off Jerusalem to isolate it from the surrounding Palestinian towns and villages, confiscating the identity papers of Palestinians without good reason and expanding the Jewish settlements around the city. "Now, my own existence in the city is threatened," Husseini said. All Palestinian non-Jerusalem residents need special permission to go to Jerusalem. Such permission is almost impossible to obtain. In several cases, Palestinian children and pregnant women have died at Israeli checkpoints on the outskirts of Jerusalem when soldiers prevented them from travelling to Palestinian hospitals in the city.

The main threat facing the peace process, according to the Palestinian officials interviewed, is that Netanyahu's policies are undermining the credibility of the Palestinian leadership and fuelling the popularity of the more extremist elements on both sides.

"Here in Palestine, we have a secular leadership. But the minute the peace process loses its credibility, the parties who will prosper are the extremist forces, and they are just waiting for that. The first ones to pay the price will be those of us who have called for peace over the past years," Husseini said. He added that if Netanyahu was intent on making security a precondition for meeting his own obligations, he should give Palestinians full control over their own areas.

"As a people, we want peace, we love peace, and think that it is the best alternative for us. But in the short run, I am very pessimistic. The question now is who will use the bullet of mercy on this peace process. No one so far has been ready to shoulder this responsibility," Husseini said.

Asked why he continues dealing with Netanyahu when the man has comprehensively proved that he does not believe in the peace process, Arafat said: "I am dealing with him because he has been elected by the Israeli people. There is also an agreement between us, and I respect what I signed in the hope of achieving the peace of the brave."

Palestinian Minister of Planning Nabil Shaath summed up the situation by saying that he did not see a way out of the present stalemate "without very serious intervention from outside, particularly by the United States and Europe. All the other options are undesirable. The situation now is one of absolute lack of progress."

Hebron: a new apartheid regime

One year after the Hebron Protocol, the West Bank town remains volatile — with fanatical Israeli settlers occupying the city centre under the protection of army guns

At an imaginary line separating the old city in Hebron from the rest of the town, a group of Israeli soldiers ran around a small deserted house with their machine guns pointed at those walking in the street. For a group of visiting journalists, it was a terrifying scene, and many thought that they would suffer the same fate as nine Palestinian photographers who were badly injured by Israeli army bullets last week while covering demonstrations in this volatile city.

"This is only a practice. Don't worry," said one resident of Hebron who was accompanying the journalists. But this is the day-to-day reality for the 200,000 Palestinians living in Hebron, together with 400 extremist Jewish settlers whose numbers drop to 200 at night as many return to their homes elsewhere. Those settlers are protected by 1,500 heavily armed soldiers ready to shoot at any time.

Al-Ahram Weekly visited Hebron only one day after a 13-year-old Palestinian boy died because of an Israeli army bullet which destroyed his brain. He was standing watching demonstrators protesting the killing of three Palestinian workers in Tarqumia near Hebron when he was struck in the head by a so-called rubber bullet and declared clinically dead upon arrival at the hospital. Palestinians insist that the Israeli army's "rubber bullets" are a myth and are in reality metal bullets coated with rubber.

After the 1994 massacre of 30 Muslim worshippers at the Ibrahimi Mosque, the situation in Hebron never went back to normal. The supposedly "dovish" former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres lost a golden opportunity after the massacre to remove the Hebron settlers — who are hated even by the majority of Israelis for their extremist ideas. "We would not like to have them as our neighbours, even in Tel Aviv," said one Israeli.

Now the gunman in the Ibrahimi Mosque massacre, Baruch Goldstein, has turned into a saint for the settlers living in Hebron. A mausoleum was built for the "beloved hero" and some settlers make a pilgrimage to it every weekend together with their children to learn the lessons of hatred and bloodshed.

Hebron has a long history in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Following clashes between Palestinians and Jewish settlers in 1929, a group of Palestinians raided Hebron — which had an old Jewish community — and massacred 68 people. The catastrophe would have been worse if the Palestinian neighbours of many Jews hadn't offered them protection, saving the lives of at least 1,800 Jews. The Jewish community left Hebron after the massacre, leaving behind their houses which were concentrated in the old city at the centre of Hebron.

But even those original Hebronite Jews, despite the terror they survived, do not approve of the practices of Hebron's new settlers. A letter published in *Ha'aretz* newspaper on 6 December 1996 in their name stated:

"We, the descendants of the old Jewish community in Hebron who had lived in the city for hundreds of years, ask for peace.

The settlers who live in the heart of Hebron are not authorised to speak in the name of the ancient Jewish community. Their claim that they are pursuing our fathers' way is a lie and a deceit. They are strangers to the culture and methodology of the Hebronite Jews. Therefore, the Israeli government is obliged to evacuate the group of settlers from Hebron immediately before they can explode the political process and damage the chances of peace."

After the 1967 occupation of the West Bank and Jerusalem, one of the first Israeli aims was to isolate the old city in Hebron in order to make it exclusive for Jews. Palestinians were not allowed to renew their homes or their shops, forcing them gradually to leave the old city and to build houses elsewhere. Meanwhile, the West Bank town became surrounded by the Keryat Arabaa settlement. Thus, the siege of Hebron is both internal and external.

The settlers who are now living in Hebron come mostly from Brooklyn and New York. "They are extremely fanatic," says Hebron's mayor Mostafa Natshe. "They don't miss any opportunity to express their hostility to the Palestinians of Hebron. We can't co-exist with such people."

Many hoped that the signing of the Hebron Protocol in January 1997 by Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat would lead to an improvement in the situation. But it only got worse. The agreement divided the town into Hebron 1 and Hebron 2 (H1 and H2). H1 — comprising 80 per cent of the town — falls under Palestinian control, while H2, the old city, is under Israeli control. Now H2 is nothing but a military fortress. Al-Shuhadaa Street, the main street in Hebron, and the wholesale vegetable market remain closed until today after a year of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations on their reopening. Palestinian cars cannot drive into the street, and only settlers are allowed to drive under the heavy protection of the Israeli soldiers. Palestinians who take the risk of even walking in the street are subjected to harassment by the army soldiers who search them, force them to stand against the wall and keep them waiting for hours before giving them their identity cards back.

"The situation in Hebron is worse than what used to take place in South Africa during apartheid," says Natshe. "Even in South Africa there were no streets which were exclusive to whites only."

Meanwhile, any Palestinian who wants to travel to other Palestinian areas or to Israel must carry a magnetic ID card issued by the Israeli army. Palestinians refer to it as "the slave card".

International observers from six countries — Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and Italy — continue to roam the streets of Hebron, "but all they can do is to file a report to the United Nations. If they saw a settler harassing a Palestinian, they cannot stop him," Natshe said. Sometimes, even the observers are harassed by settlers.

The instructions given to Israeli soldiers is to open fire immediately on any Palestinian seen harassing a settler, but if the opposite happens, "the soldier will tell the Palestinian that he can go file a complaint the next day," Hebron's mayor added.

"What encourages the soldiers to mistreat the Palestinians, and even kill them like what happened in Tarqumia is that they know they will not be punished. They will be released after a short investigation, and that is all. The Israeli government now in power shares the views of those settlers, and that is why they never do anything to stop them," Natshe said.

Take-off still delayed

Although work was completed nearly a year ago, Gaza Airport today stands deserted, just another example of unkept Israeli promises made in peace agreements signed with Palestinians

Under the 1993 Oslo Accords, Palestinians should have been allowed to open an airport, a harbour and industrial zones in order to improve their deteriorating economic conditions. Israel also agreed to open a so-called safe passage between the West Bank and Gaza and to release thousands of Palestinians held in Israeli prisons. These were all pledges stated in the interim agreement and should have been met at least two years ago. The former Labour government failed to fulfil these pledges, and the present Israeli government of Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu is not expected to do much better.

"We are dying to have that airport open," said Palestinian Minister of Planning Nabil Shaath, who was involved in negotiating the establishment of the airport, the harbour and the industrial zones. "But the Israelis are always coming with new security restrictions and demands every time we think we are close to reaching an agreement," he added.

After Netanyahu came to power, his government asked for a special checking zone inside the airport in which Palestinian baggage would be searched before going to another checking point. That violated the original agreement signed between the two sides which stated that there should be a single checking point in which Israeli soldiers would stand, undetected, behind dark windows, Shaath said.

"The Israelis spent two years asking for a special checking point in return for allowing us full control over the rest of the airport. When we accepted an Israeli checking point, they reneged on the rest of the bargain. They now want full security control over every single inch in the airport. This latest demand was only made six weeks ago," Shaath said.

Even when it came to symbols used by international airports to identify themselves, the Israelis had their own conditions. According to aviation rules, each country has its own initials followed by the abbreviation of the name of the airport. Israel's initials are LL. Thus, Ben Gurion Airport, near Tel Aviv, for example, is referred to as LLBG. Palestinians wanted reference to their airport to be PP (Palestine) and GZ (Gaza). But since the letter P is used by Paraguay, they asked the International Aviation Organisation to use VV instead. Israelis rejected the VV because Palestinians do not have a state of their own, and they insisted that Gaza Airport should also start with Israel's LL initials. "We suggested a compromise. We told them 'let us call it LVGZ — an Israeli letter, a Palestinian letter followed by the name of the airport.' But they refused that as well. Even such symbolic matters have to be negotiated and we did not reach agreement up to last week," Shaath said.

"It is unbelievable. Whatever you do to make things easier, they come up with new requirements that make it impossible for us to reach agreement," Shaath added.

When it came to launching Palestinian Airlines, the Israelis had conditions, too. They said the Palestinian Aviation Authority (PAA) was not allowed to sign agreements with other countries to open new routes. That, they claimed, should be restricted to Palestinian Airlines on the grounds that if agreements were signed by the Aviation Authority, it might give the impression that Palestine is an independent state with its own institutions. "So, if another country is willing to allow its airline to sign an agreement with our airline, we can start exchanging flights. But we can only sign these agreements with countries which do not have diplomatic relations with Israel. If there are diplomatic relations, the agreement should be signed by the Israeli Aviation Authority, not by us," Shaath said.

Israel insisted that in case a country did not have relations with it, and there was an agreement signed between the Palestinian Airlines and that country's national airline, the agreement would then be immediately cancelled if that country decided to establish diplomatic ties with Israel.

When negotiations started over the airport, Israel did not want to call it Gaza Airport in the first place. It suggested the name Al-Dehina Airport, after a small Palestinian village on the border with Egypt where Palestinian collaborators are now living under the protection of the Israeli army. Palestinians rejected the suggestion.

Saeed Bashir, a ground navigator at Gaza Airport, said that work began on 20 January 1996 by Egypt's Arab Contractors Company together with Palestinian and Moroccan contractors. But until now, only two planes have landed at the airport. One belonged to Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat while the other, a Moroccan flight, carried aid to Palestinians during one of the long Israeli closures of the Gaza Strip. The PAA has three airplanes so far, two Dutch Fokkers which now fly out of El-Arish Airport to Jordan and Saudi Arabia and a Boeing 727 donated by Saudi Prince Walid bin Talal. Bashir added that some of the navigation and electronic equipment donated by Germany and Spain remain stranded in harbours on orders of the Israelis. Israel has also prevented Palestinians from running the airport at night or buying equipment necessary for that purpose.

Gaza Airport, only 700 metres from the Egyptian border, resembles Rabat Airport. Fifty Moroccans are currently working on the VIP lounge, which also includes a dome similar to the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.

"We are ready to operate the airport in 40 minutes if we get the go-ahead. We are also ready to function fully in two to three months maximum. But we are still waiting for a political decision," Bashir added.

Pax Americana envelops Africa

President Clinton's African tour, the most extensive by a sitting American president, puts the spotlight on Africa, writes **Gamal Nkrumah**



US President Bill Clinton and his host Ghanaian President Jerry Rawlings surrounded by jubilating crowds (photo: AFP)

If 1997 was a year that the traditionally pessimistic Africa analysts got right, this year is starting to look like one they have read all wrong. There haven't been any major crises to make a mess of all the foreboding forecasts. What's more, the continent's long-suffering 700 million residents now yearn for America's golden handshake — a reward for patiently instituting sweeping International Monetary Fund economic reforms which have had crippling social costs even while turning African economies around.

This week, Washington appears to be obliging. "It is time for Americans to put a new Africa on our map," declared US President Bill Clinton in the Ghanaian capital Accra's Independence Square, where some 250,000 Ghanaians had gathered. Ghana was the first stop on Clinton's African tour. "The Cold War is gone. Colonialism is gone. Apartheid is gone. Yet remnants of past troubles remain," Clinton told the one million Ghanaians who had converged on Accra to catch a glimpse of him. Clinton, jostled by the swarming throng, got more than he bargained for. At times, the Ghanaian welcome seemed overwhelming. "Back up, back up," the alarmed and obviously angered American president screamed at young Ghanaians who jostled to touch him. Clinton's security men could do nothing as the crowds pressed on the presidential entourage. Ghanaian President Jerry John Rawlings, himself dubbed as "Junior Jesus", compared the jubilation to a biblical scene and draped the wide-eyed American president in the traditional gold-thread embroidered Ghanaian toga-like *kente*.

Clinton's African tour has drawn the world's eye to the continent's emergence as a global economic player. Africa's fast-expanding economy has attracted the attention of American investors. "Today we export more goods to Africa than to eastern Europe and the republics of the former Soviet Union," US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said last week.

This makes a mockery of the prophets of gloom and doom. But, all is not smooth-sailing. Some of the best-performing countries like Ghana have serious economic problems — trade imbalances and a crippling foreign debt burden. According to World Bank figures, Ghana owes international financial institutions $5.6 billion, which is equivalent to four times the annual Ghanaian government revenue. Moreover, Ghana's debt is rising at an alarming rate of seven per cent per year. Senegal, another African success story on Clinton's itinerary, owes international financial institutions $3.8 billion.

"Every democracy, including our own, is a work in progress," remarked Albright last week. But in Ghana, Clinton decried "Nigerian military dictatorship". Nigeria and Congo, respectively Africa's most populous and potentially richest countries, proved to be the mavericks of the continent. Sudan, the continent's largest country, has also cast itself adrift from the new African consensus on liberalising and democratising their political systems.

Washington exerts enormous influence in Africa where superficial observers wrongly surmise that political sentiments seem often more stirred by fertile speculation than real substance. The list of Clinton's entourage reads like a 'who's who' directory of black America.

Among the prominent African Americans accompanying President Clinton are Transportation Secretary Rodney Slater, Labour Secretary Alexis Herman, the Reverend Jesse Jackson, National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People President Kweisi Mfume, Detroit Mayor Dennis Archer and Robert Johnson, the president of Black Entertainment Television. The presidential entourage of over 1,000 high-powered professionals, politicians and businessmen travelled to Africa on three presidential jets. An aircraft carrying some 400 media workers landed three hours before Clinton's plane touched down at Ghana's Kotoka International Airport.

There are plenty of immediate spinoffs from Clinton's African tour. Ghana, for example, is to receive a $2 million grant from Clinton to bolster the Ghana Heritage Conservation Trust. A restoration project of Ghana's 45 colonial castles and the slave forts that dot the country's Atlantic seaboard is to receive a $10 million grant from the US Agency for International Development. The forts built mainly by early Portuguese, Dutch, British and Danish slave traders between the 15th and 18th centuries are today key tourist attractions. African American tourists outnumber all other tourists to Ghana.

Ghana was the first country to which former President John Kennedy sent Americans as peace corps volunteers in 1961 when the US programme began. Clinton in Ghana paid tribute to America's peace corps programme in the West African country. Ghana, in the grip of crippling electricity shortages, has signed an agreement with America whereby the latter undertook to underwrite a $67 million deal for a barge-mounted power plant to ease the nation's pressing power problems.

Clinton left Ghana for Uganda to attend the Entebbe Summit for Peace and Prosperity and meet several African leaders.

Africa's share of world trade is expected to triple in the next decade. Global trade is the only game in town, and America wants to see Africa as a player. Africa can play the part of trader and customer instead of aid recipient. US policy-makers now do not ask themselves what to do for Africa or about Africa, but rather how to do business with Africa. "We as a nation still have more to learn about Africa," Albright confessed.

A pact with the Devil

The extreme right-wing National Front is offering its support to French centre-right politicians, and some candidates are taking the bait. **Hosni Abdel-Rehim** writes from Paris

Following last Sunday's first round of French regional assembly elections, the leftist coalition of the Communists and French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin's Socialist Party appeared set to capture the presidency of 14 out of 22 councils. In an attempt to stop the left's advance at the polls, renegades from the French mainstream rightist parties — President Jacques Chirac's neo-Gaullist Rally for the Republic (RPR) and the centre-right Union for Democracy (UDF) — formed their own coalition of sorts with the National Front (NF), Jean-Marie Le Pen's racist and xenophobic party, representing the county's extreme right wing.

Emerging as a powerful potential "king maker" after having gained 15.5 per cent of the vote, the infamous NF vied to edge closer to political respectability by trying to align themselves with the UDF and the RPR, which got 36 per cent to the left's 40 per cent. In a much-touted appeal to the traditional right, the NF offered to hand over their voters to both the UDF and the RPR in order to block a potential victory of the left in last Friday's second round at the polls in exchange for a "minimal" joint platform including an agreement to "give priority to security issues, defend French cultural identity and refuse to raise taxes."

In defence of "national cultural identity", the Front has called for "foreigners" — among them French citizens of non-Aryan descent — to be mass-deported. "The races are unequal. It's what every Frenchman thinks privately," is one of Le Pen's pet slogans. Specifically targeting alien Arab and African immigrants, who allegedly cause unemployment by flooding the market and usurping jobs that should rightfully go to the French, the NF has managed to strengthen its base and broaden its constituency.

Le Pen also skilfully plays on the ultra-nationalist theme of communal solidarity, based on the white Judeo-Christian ethics, against the twin threats of "African underdevelopment" and "Islamic terrorism", to mobilise a sizable sector of the right-wing constituency. In addition, the NF blames the foreigners for social ills like the decaying moral fabric, the deteriorating infrastrucutre and the rising crime rate.

"Will RPR and UDF councillors stand by passively and watch left-wing presidents be elected?" railed Bruno Megret, NF deputy leader and Le Pen's rival for its leadership.

"Pick up the phone, UDF and RPR! That's all you need to do to avoid the left taking this region," chirped Jean-Ives Le Gallou, head of the far-right list in Ile-de-France, the prestigious upper-class Greater Paris region. Vying hard for mainstream political acceptance, Le Pen seems to have turned over a new leaf by offering to assist the RPR. A long-time foe of Jacques Chirac, the NF leader has in the past been averse to supporting the president's party.

In a desperate bid to keep its image intact and keep the NF at bay — at least publicly — UDF and RPR leaders blasted any kind of rapprochement with the extreme right-wing. Said RPR leader Philippe Seguin: "We cannot endorse their outrageous outbursts and the terrible words that remind us of anti-Semitism, racism and xenophobia." Throwing his political weight behind the party's official position, President Chirac also denounced any attempts to forge alliances with Le Pen. "I believe that when one has republican convictions, which is my own case and that of a very great majority of French people, one must make no compromise," said President Chirac on the eve of the vote.

Despite the official warning, six right-wing candidates for regional council presidencies won their seats by allying themselves with the Front. "Jacques Blanc, (UDF) outgoing head of the Languedoc-Roussillon region around Montpellier, was the first to go to bed with the Front," reported the French news agency AFP. Fearing that the ruling left-wing coalition would capture the presidency, Blanc accepted the Front's "minimal" joint platform and was elected with the help of its constituency. Blanc was promptly expelled from the ranks of the UDF, along with other party colleagues and former RPR Secretary-General François Mancel, a Chirac adviser. Blanc was undeterred, claiming that party officials were out of touch with the grassroots and did not understand the politics of local constituencies.

Although Socialist candidate Michel Vauzelle was elected president of the southern Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur regions on Monday, in other provinces spanning north and south France — from the Bourgogne Centre, Languedoc-Roussillon, and Rhône-Alpes, the country's second biggest and most economically powerful region — incumbent right-wingers were voted into office with NF support. Buoyed by his party's behind-the-scenes power, Le Gallou rejoiced that the "dykes thrown up against the Front have cracked" — an ominous reality for France's large immigrant community.

Another Balkan bloodbath

Kosovo's ethnic Albanians struggle for independence from Serbia, but the Serbs refuse to budge

THE SERBIAN government in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, while refusing international interference, has so far been unsuccessful in luring Albanian leaders from the disputed Kosovo region to the negotiating table for talks which could ultimately grant them "wide-ranging" autonomy. Since 28 February, more than 100 ethnic Albanians have been killed by Serbian forces in the disputed region of two million where Albanians outnumber Serbs by nine to one.

Foreign powers — the so-called Balkan Contact Group comprising the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Russia, with the European Union — have voiced concerns over the rising violence in Kosovo.

Serbian strongman Slobodan Milosevic, currently president of Yugoslavia, stripped Kosovo of its autonomous status within the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1989. The international community, while acknowledging ethnic Albanians' suffering, does not support the full independence which the region has been hoping to achieve since 1991.

Last Sunday in Kosovo's capital, Prishtina, a majority of ethnic Albanians re-elected Ibrahim Rugova as leader of the Democratic League of Kosovo and president of the Kosovo Republic. These elections, which were first held in Kosovo in 1991, were followed by a referendum in which ethnic Albanians expressed the desire to secede from Serbia. A parallel government was established with its own educational, medical and tax system. Serbia condemned these actions as illegal.

Adem Demaci, Rugova's main political rival, refused to run saying the situation in Kosovo was too volatile to play political games. Kosovo Albanians also voted for a parliament consisting of 130 members. "These elections are very important for our people, for our independence, and for Kosovo's legitimacy and democracy," said Rugova. However, the Drenica region of Kosovo did not take part in the poll because since 5 March it has been under occupation by Serb paramilitary forces who have threatened to expel Drenica's ethnic Albanians.

The Serb attack on Drenica was sparked off by what Serbs say was a wave of 131 "terrorist attacks" against Serbs which killed 40 people between 1997 and 1998. These are thought to have been carried out by the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). Albanians argue that these reports have been exaggerated by Serb propagandists to justify their repression.

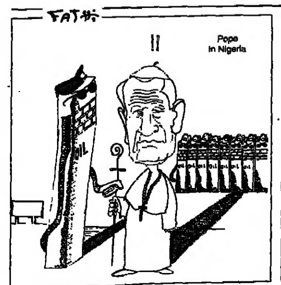
"Kosovo has always been and remains a part of our republic, Serbia, and is actually part of Yugoslavia," Vladimir Nesic, chargé d'affaires at the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia Embassy in Cairo, told Maye Ostowani. "They have their own mother country [Albania]," Nesic said. He accused Albania and other countries abroad, which he refused to name, of supporting and financing "parallel institutions in Kosovo."

"Kosovo to us is like Mecca is to you," Nesic explained. "Our Orthodox Church was created there. It is the cradle of our state, culture and religion." Kosovo not only produces most of Yugoslavia's mineral resources — lead, zinc, gold and nickel, as well as oil and coal — it also has the most fertile of Serbia's arable land.

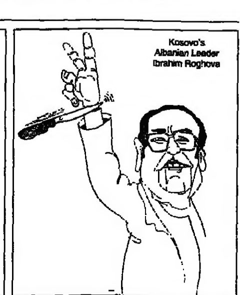
Kosovo's Albanian population, however, counter that they were the first people to settle the Balkans — long before the Serbs and other Slavic peoples invaded the area. After the break-up of the former Yugoslavia, Croatia, Bosnia and Macedonia all declared independence. "If a republic of one million people [Bosnia] can declare independence, then shouldn't that same opportunity be granted a republic of two million people?" asked Beqir Ismaili, representative of the Republic of Kosovo Information Centre in the Arab world and manager of the Alba Press in Cairo. Defending Kosovo's right to independence, Ismaili argued that "there is no other republic in all of Yugoslavia that has 90 per cent [of its population] of the same ethnic group." Ismaili insisted that all the people of Kosovo want is their independence through peaceful means; but after years of silently enduring repression, torture and killings, the Albanians of Kosovo have become impatient.

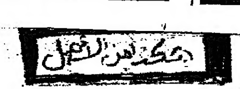
"We are opposed to all kinds of terrorism. We support negotiations through dialogue. Thus this accusation is simply not true that we support terrorism amongst a people who are not protected and are subjected to repression and killings," ambassador of the Republic of Albania in Cairo, Haki Shtalbi, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "Albania supports the Albanians in Kosovo to attain their most basic human and national rights — but through dialogue only," said Shtalbi.

"In Drenica, mostly women and children were killed and we have pictures to prove that some victims were tortured before being killed," said Kosovo-born Beqir Ismaili. He explained that the Serbs barged into the homes of Kosovo Albanians and proceeded to slaughter families in their entirety. "Is the newborn a terrorist?" he demanded. "What about this ten-year-old boy who was killed, was he a terrorist?" There is no terrorism in Kosovo, explained Ismaili, because "the man who fights to defend his country, his home, and his family is not a terrorist."

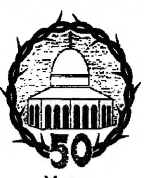








Scenes from Palestine



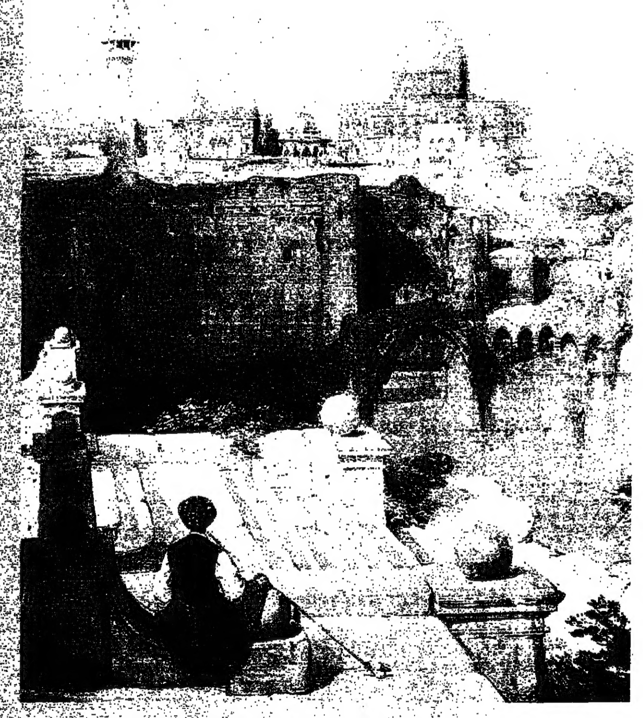
Years of dispossession

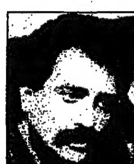


Edward Said, returning to Palestine for a BBC documentary to be shown in England to coincide with Israel's 50th anniversary, finds the once small, compact city — Jerusalem — in which he grew up overwhelmed by continuing, unrelenting Judaisation

I have just returned from two separate trips to Jerusalem and the West Bank, where I have been making a film for the BBC to be shown in England on 3 May, and then later in the month on the World Service. The occasion for my film is Israel's 50th anniversary, which I am examining from a personal and obviously Palestinian point of view. For our shooting in Palestine we have had an excellent crew: an English director, a young Anglo-Indian woman (whose idea it was to approach me for the film in the first place), a Palestinian cameraman, and an Israeli soundman. We concluded work on the film in New York a few days ago; all that remains is cutting, editing, and assembling the many hours of interviews, scenes from Palestinian life, etc. into a one-hour film. This is obviously the most difficult part of the job since we already have far too much material to be conveniently stuffed into a meagre 55 minutes. But so powerful for me was the experience of going around Palestine and recording what I saw that it seemed to me worthwhile here to reflect a little on the experience itself. I should say also that director and crew were immensely cooperative and helpful; even the Israeli sound engineer, who is employed by the BBC in Jerusalem, found the actual business of talking to Palestinians and a few Israelis very rewarding and, given his conventional Zionist upbringing (he is a liberal, by no means a dogmatic Zionist), enlightening and a definitive challenge to long-held and unexamined views about Israel's history. "It is hard to be an Israeli again," he said at the end of the shoot.

Two completely contradictory impressions override all the others. First, that Palestine and Palestinians remain, despite Israel's concerted efforts from the beginning either to get rid of them or to circumscribe them so much as to make them ineffective. In this, I am confident in saying, we have proved the utter folly of Israel's policy: there is no getting away from the fact that as an idea, a memory, and as an often buried or invisible reality, Palestine and its people have simply not disappeared. No matter the sustained and unbroken hostility of the Zionist establishment to anything that Palestine represents, the sheer fact of our existence has foiled, where it has not defeated, the Israeli effort to be rid of us completely. The more Israel wraps itself in exclusivity and xenophobia towards the Arabs, the more it assists them in staying on, in fighting its injustices and cruel measures. This is specially true in the case of Israeli Palestinians, whose main representative in the Knesset is the remarkable Azmi Bishara: I interviewed him at length for the film and was impressed with the courage and intelligence of his stand, which is invigorating a new generation of young Palestinians, whom I also interviewed. For them, as for an increasing number of Israelis (Professor Israel Shahak in the forefront) the real battle is for equality and rights of citizenship, given that Israel is explicitly a state for Jews and not for its non-Jewish citizens. Contrary to its expressed and implemented intention, therefore, Israel has strengthened the Palestinian presence, even among Israeli Jewish citizens who have simply lost patience with the unendingly-shortsighted policy of trying to beat down and exclude Palestinians. No matter where you turn, we are there, often only as humble, silent workers and compliant restaurant waiters, cooks, and the like, but often also as large numbers of people — in Hebron, for example — who continuously resist Israeli encroachments on our lives.





"The more Israel wraps itself in exclusivity and xenophobia towards the Arabs, the more it assists them in staying on, in fighting its injustices and cruel measures. This is specially true in the case of Israeli Palestinians, whose main representative in the Knesset is the remarkable Azmi Bishara"

The second overriding impression is that minute by minute, hour by hour, day after day, we are losing more and more Palestinian land to the Israelis. There wasn't a road, or a bypassing highway, or a small village that we passed in our travels for three weeks that wasn't witness to the daily tragedy of land expropriated, fields bulldozed, trees, plants, and crops uprooted, houses destroyed, while the Palestinian owners stood by, helpless to do much to stop the onslaught, unassisted by Mr Arafat's Authority, uncared for by more fortunate Palestinians. It is important not to underestimate the damage that is being done, the violence to our lives that will ensue, the distortions and misery that result. There is nothing quite like the feeling of sorrowful helplessness that one feels listening to a young man who has spent fifteen years working as an illegal daylaborer in Israel in order to save up money to build a little house for his family, only to discover one day upon returning from work that the house has been reduced to a pile of rubble, flattened by an Israeli bulldozer with everything still inside the house. When you ask why this was done — the land, after all, was his — you are told that there was no warning, only a paper given to him the next day by an Israeli soldier stating that he had built the structure without a licence. Where in the world, except under Israeli authority, are people required to have a license (which is always denied them) before they can build on their own property? Jews can build, but never Palestinians. This is racist apartheid in its purest form.

I once stopped on the main road from Jerusalem to Hebron to record on film an Israeli bulldozer, surrounded and protected by soldiers, plowing through some fertile land just alongside the road. About a hundred metres away stood four Palestinian men, looking both miserable and angry. It was their land, I was told, which they had worked for generations, now being destroyed on the pretext that it was needed to widen an already wide road built for the settlements. "Why do they need a road that will be 120 metres wide; why can't they let me go on farming my land?" asked one of them plaintively. "How am I going to feed my children?" I asked the men whether they received any warning that this was going to be done. No, they said, we just heard today and when we got here it was too late. What about the Authority? I asked, has it helped? No of course not, was the answer. They're never here when we need them. I went over to the Israeli soldiers who at first refused to talk to me in the presence of cameras and microphones. But I kept insisting, and was lucky to find one who clearly seemed troubled by the whole business, even though he said he was merely following orders. "But don't you see how unjust it is to take land from farmers who have no defense against you?" I said, to which he replied, "It's not their land really. It belongs to the state of Israel." I recall saying to him that sixty years ago the same arguments were made against Jews in Germany, and now here were Jews using it against their victims, the Palestinians. He moved away, unwilling to respond.

And so it is throughout the territories and Jerusalem, with Palestinians powerless to help each other. I gave a lecture at the University of Bethlehem in which I spoke about the continuous dispossession that was taking place, and wondered why those 50,000 security people employed by the Authority, plus the thousands more who sit behind desks, pushing paper from one side of their desks to the other, cashing handsome checks at the end of each month, why they were not out there on the land helping to prevent the expropriations, helping the people whose livelihood was being taken from them before their eyes? Why, I asked, don't villagers go out to their fields and simply stand in front of the bulldozers, and why don't all our great leaders give support and moral help to the poor people who are losing the battle? One night I came back from filming all day and discovered that the hotel restaurant was sponsoring a Valentine's Day dinner at $38 (yes, $38) per person. I was told that since I didn't have a reservation I couldn't be served, but I insisted that as a guest in the hotel I was at least entitled to a sandwich or something equally simple. I was shown a table in the corner and duly served a plate of rice and vegetables. A moment or two later I saw a Palestinian minister enter the room with seven guests, and sit at a prominent table weighted down with the seven-course Valentine's Day menu, plus wine, and drinks for all. I was so sickened by the sight of this large, fat, smiling man who spends so much time "negotiating" with donor countries and with the Israelis, eating away happily while his people were losing their livelihood a few metres away, that I left the room in disgust and shame. He had arrived in a gigantic Mercedes: his bodyguards and driver — three of them — were sitting in the hotel lobby eating bananas, while their great leader stuffed himself inside. This is one reason why wherever I went, whoever I talked to, whatever the question, there was never a good word for the Authority or its officers. It is perceived basically as guaranteeing security for Israel and its settlers, furnishing them with protection, not at all as a legitimate, or concerned, or helpful governmental body vis-à-vis its own people. That at the same time so many of these leaders should think it appropriate to build gigantically ostentatious villas during a period of such widespread penury and misery fairly boggles the mind. If it is to be anything today, leadership for the Palestinian people must demonstrate service and sacrifice, precisely those two things so lacking in the Authority. What I found staggering is the absence of care, that is, the sense that each Palestinian is alone in his or her misery, with no one so much as concerned to offer food, blankets, or a kind word. Truly one feels that Palestinians are an orphaned people.

Jerusalem is overwhelming in its continuing, unrelenting Judaisation. The small, compact city in which I grew up over fifty years ago, has become an enormously spread-out metropolis, surrounded on the north, south, east and west by immense building projects that testify to Israeli power and its ability, unchecked, to change the character of Jerusalem. Here too there is a manifest sense of Palestinian powerlessness, as if the battle is over and the future settled. Most people I spoke to said that after the tunnel episode of last September they no longer felt the need to demonstrate against Israeli practices, nor to expose themselves to more sacrifice. "After all," one of them told me, "sixty of us were killed, and yet the tunnel remained open, and Arafat went to Washington, despite having said that he would not meet with Netanyahu unless the tunnel was closed. What is the point of struggling now?" It is not only the Palestinian leadership that has failed in Jerusalem: it is also the Arabs, the Islamic states, and Christianity itself, which bows before Israeli aggression. Few Palestinians from Gaza or the West Bank (i.e. from cities like Ramallah, Hebron, Bethlehem, Jenine and Nablus) can enter Jerusalem, which is cordoned off by Israeli soldiers. Apartheid once again.

On the Israeli side the situation is not as bleak as one would have expected. I conducted a long interview with Professor Ilan Pappe of Haifa University. He is one of the new Israeli historians whose work on 1948 has challenged Zionist orthodoxy on the refugee problem, and on Ben Gurion's role in making the Palestinians leave. In this, of course, the new historians have confirmed what Palestinian historians and witnesses have said all along — that there was a deliberate military campaign to rid the country of as many Arabs as possible. But what Pappe also said is that he is very much in demand for lectures in high schools all over Israel, even though the latest textbooks for classes on Israel's history simply make no mention of the Palestinians at all. This blindness, coexisting with a new openness regarding the past, characterises the present mood, but deserves our attention as a contradiction to be deepened and analysed further.

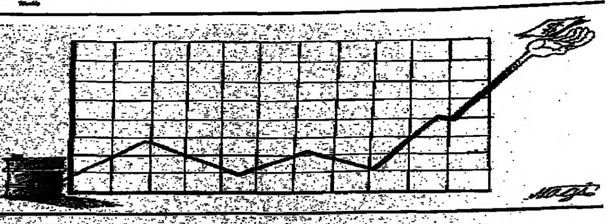
I spent a day filming in Hebron, which strikes me as embodying all the worst aspects of Oslo. A small handful of settlers, numbering no more than about 200 people, virtually control the heart of an Arab city whose population of over 100,000 is left on the margins, unable to visit the city centre, constantly under threat from militants and soldiers alike. I visited the house of a Palestinian in the old Ottoman quarter. He is now surrounded by settler bastions, including three new buildings that have gone up around him, plus three enormous water tanks that steal most of the city's water for the settlers, plus several rooftop nests of soldiers. He was very bitter about the Palestinian leadership's willingness to accept the town's partition on the entirely specious grounds that it had once contained 14 Jewish buildings dating back to Old Testament times but no longer in evidence. "How did these Palestinian negotiators accept such a grotesque distortion of the reality," he asked me angrily, "especially given that at the time of the negotiations not one of them had ever set foot in Hebron when they negotiated the deal?" The day after I was in Hebron three young men were killed at the barricade by Israeli soldiers, and many more injured in the fighting that ensued. Hebron and Jerusalem are victories for Israeli extremism, not for coexistence, or for any sort of hopeful future.

Perhaps the most unexpected highpoint of experiences with Israelis was an interview I held with Daniel Barenboim, the brilliant conductor and pianist who was in Jerusalem for a recital at the same time I was there for the film. Born and raised in Argentina, Barenboim came to Israel in 1950 at the age of nine, lived there for about eight years, and has been conducting the Berlin State Opera and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra — two of the world's greatest musical institutions — for the last ten years. I should also say that over the past few years he and I have become close personal friends. He was very open in our interview and regretted that 50 years of Israel should also be the occasion of 50 years of suffering for the Palestinian people; during our discussion he openly advocated a Palestinian state, and after his Jerusalem recital to a packed audience, he dedicated his first encore to the Palestinian woman — present at the recital — who had invited him to dinner the night before. I was surprised that the entire audience of Israeli Jews (she and I were the only Palestinians present) received his views and the noble dedication with enthusiastic applause. Clearly a new constituency of conscience is beginning to emerge, partly as a result of Netanyahu's excesses, partly as a result of Palestinian resistance. What I found extremely heartening is that Barenboim, one of the world's greatest musicians, has offered his services as a pianist to Palestinian audiences, a gesture of reconciliation that is truly worth more than dozens of Oslo Accords.

So I conclude these brief scenes from Palestinian life today. I regret not having spent time among refugees in Lebanon and Syria, and I also regret not having many hours of film at my disposal. But at this moment it seems important that we testify to the resilience and continued potency of the Palestinian cause, which clearly has influenced more people in Israel and elsewhere than we have hitherto supposed. Despite the gloom of the present moment, there are rays of hope indicating that the future may not be as bad as many of us have supposed.

We welcome letters and contributions on all subjects raised on this page. Material may be edited for length and clarity; it should be addressed to M. Anis, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St., Cairo; Fax: +202 578 6089; E-mail: weekly@ahram.org.eg

OPEC's hold drops with oil prices



A drop in oil prices is sending shock waves well beyond the budgets of OPEC countries, writes **Safa Haeri** from Paris

With no prospect of an immediate recovery at hand, the dramatic, if not devastating, fall in the price of oil is placing unprecedented burdens on the budgets of many exporting countries, most of which, like Iran, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria and Algeria, depend on the commodity for more than 75 per cent of their revenues, according to senior oil analysts.

Since the start of this year, the "black gold" has lost more than 40 per cent of its value, falling from $18 per barrel in January to under $13 for Brent, or the North Sea oil reference, its lowest level since 1988. This means that on average, Persian Gulf oil is selling at around $12 and the Iranian at only $10.

"For each dollar lost on a barrel of oil, Saudi Arabia, the world's largest producer and exporter, loses $2.5 billion a year," noted an oil expert. "Iran is going to face one of its worst years," added another.

For the third time in as many months, Iranian President Ayatollah Mohammad Khatami has been forced to revise budget revenues, lowering them from a high of $17 billion to an estimated $10 billion. The finance minister of the United Arab Emirates has called for drastic cuts in government spending and Kuwait has already decided on a 25 per cent cut in state expenses.

Long-time arbiter, if not the only decision-maker of the world oil market, the 11-nation Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) has lost its grip. The reason has been overproduction by OPEC states by about two million barrels per day (mbd) above its official ceiling of 27.5 mbd. Other factors include the collapse of the most dynamic, oil-consuming economies in Southeast Asia, a relatively mild winter which reduced consumption in the Western hemisphere, refusal by major oil producing companies to cooperate with OPEC in regulating prices and the return of Iraq to the market.

"There is nothing OPEC can do any more," said Morteza Hashemi, an Iranian oil expert formerly working for the Vienna-based OPEC. "The organisation does not have the muscle it used to have. There is so much oil in the world, so many new and important reserves have been discovered in Africa, in Asia, in South and Central America that are outside the control of OPEC. The Caspian Sea region is soon going to become OPEC's major rival," Hashemi said.

Almost all OPEC members, chiefly Venezuela, Qatar, Nigeria, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, produce more than their fixed quotas. If a member like Iran constitutes an exception, it is not because of honesty or even policy, but because the American sanctions deny Tehran access to new technologies. As a result, it cannot produce even up to its authorised limits.

"All indications are that none of the OPEC members is in a position to reduce production, and in the absence of a substantial cut in the organisation's global production by at least two mbd, there will be no prospect for price recovery," Parviz Mina, a Paris-based Iranian oil consultant told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. If Saudi Arabia is ready to stick to its quota, others, such as Venezuela, which produces 800,000 barrels per day more than its quota of 2.5 mbd, have officially said that they are not going to abide by the quota system. "We are a strong supporter of OPEC but the organisation must change, adapt itself to new realities," said Erwin Arrietta, Venezuela's energy and mines' minister.

"It is both illogical and unfair to blame Saudi Arabia always and ask it to slash its production because it is the world's largest producer while others in the organisation continue unscrupulously to increase their production above the authorised quota. If Saudi Arabia and Venezuela cannot solve their differences, one has to expect at best a stagnated market for the coming six months," said Mina.

But the impact of a disaster is nowhere as dramatic as it is in Iran, where most of the basic foodstuffs and services are subsidised by the state. Out of the latest estimated $10 billion in revenues from oil exports, Iran must pay $4.9 billion on its foreign debt services and another $5 billion to import basic food stocks. But to run the already badly ageing and crumbling oil industry, the country must inject more than $3 billion to keep it going at the present lame pace.

"Iran's oil installations and industries are outdated and exhausted. Most of the country's oil fields have run dry or have been infiltrated with salt water. Since the Islamic revolution of 1979 and the introduction of sanctions imposed by the US on oil companies, there has been no major investment, no new technology," explained Mina.

Because of diminishing revenues, Persian Gulf countries will have to send back home millions of Asian and Arab workers who, once back in their native countries, will add to the crisis these governments already face. At the same time, these countries will also have to cut on most of their labour-intensive development, particularly military programmes which, in turn, will reflect on the industrial powers.

"This is a double-edged sword. If in the short run, dwindling oil prices is good news for the economic recovery of major industrial powers, in the long run, it will certainly harm everyone, producer, exporter as well as consumer," one economist said, warning that in case oil prices do not firm up, the slide may well create social disorder both in some producing countries like Iran, where the government does not have enough reserves to weather a sustained crisis, but also in some former Southeast Asian "tigers" which have lost their teeth.

Oil output level maintained

WHILE welcoming a move by several oil producing countries to reduce the world's output, Egypt will maintain its current production level, reports **Mona El-Fiqi**.

Minister of Petroleum Hamdi El-Banbi has expressed appreciation of the coordination oil producers have shown inside and outside the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to cut world oil supplies by up to two million barrels a day in a bid to reverse the collapse in world prices.

At the same time, a source at the Ministry of Petroleum told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that Egypt, which is not an OPEC member, will keep its oil production at 850,000 barrels a day despite plans by OPEC and non-OPEC countries to cut output starting 1 April.

The source added: "Our production has been stable for the past few years and we have no plans to reduce it."

He said that Egypt's oil production had fallen from 900,000 a few years ago, even though consumption is increasing annually by about four per cent.

OPEC's decision was aimed at reversing the sharp slide in crude oil prices that has been blamed on a glut in the market because of a warm winter in Europe and the US, oversupply, the Asian financial crisis and the UN decision to increase the Iraqi quota in their oil-for-food agreement.

In line with several other oil producers, the United Arab Emirates decided to cut its crude oil output by 125,000 barrels a day from 1 April.

The pledges have totalled 870,000 barrels a day since Saudi Arabia, Venezuela, Mexico and Kuwait announced last week that they would cut world output by between 1.6 million and two million barrels daily.

Last month, oil prices fell sharply because of higher production and lower demand.

In a press statement El-Banbi said that prospects of reducing oil prices began last November when OPEC decided to raise the quota from 25 million barrels a day to 27.5 million barrels a day, a 10 per cent increase.

According to El-Banbi, some OPEC members like Qatar and Nigeria raised their quota to one million barrels a day, resulting in an increase of supply over demand, hence the drop in prices. Oil prices fell to their lowest level in four years.

As far as Egypt is concerned, El-Banbi said that the country will be badly affected by the collapse of oil prices since oil represents 10 per cent of the total local gross domestic product. "But we will try to reduce losses by increasing locally refined products and reducing the export of crude oil," El-Banbi said.

He added that the responsibility to protect and stabilise the market fell on all oil-producing countries, whether OPEC members or not.

Taking stock of the public sector

The need to clear out unsold inventory and make better use of resources in public sector companies was the subject of discussion in the People's Assembly this week. **Gamal Essam El-Din** reports

A new Central Auditing Agency (CAA) report, which states that the size and value of unsold inventory in public sector companies has reached alarming levels, triggered a parliamentary debate in the Plan and Budget Committee this week.

According to the report, the value of unsold inventory peaked last year at LE1.413 billion. That comes to 32.1 per cent of invested capital in 295 public sector companies and 45 newly privatised companies. This is up from LE1.276 billion of unsold inventory in June 1995.

The bloated 1997 inventory, according to the CAA report, includes fully manufactured products, semi-manufactured products and goods packaged for sale and inputs. The value of fully manufactured products and inputs totalled around LE1.155 billion — about 81.7 per cent of the total unsold inventory. The value of semi-manufactured goods is LE75.8 million, while the value of goods packaged for sale is LE18.25 million.

The report attributed the alarming rise in unsold inventory to a host of reasons. Foremost among them are mismanagement and misappropriation of public funds, exaggeration in estimating production inputs and the failure to conduct early marketing studies. The report also cited rapid technological changes, the deteriorating condition of existing machinery and equipment and laxity in disposing of the unsold inventory.

Spinning and weaving companies topped the list of the public sector companies suffering from inventory backlog. Minister of Industry Soliman Reda, speaking to the Plan and Budget Committee, blamed the rise in cotton prices in the past few years, but said the companies are recovering.

The committee also discussed another CAA report about unutilised capacities in public sector companies. According to this report, these capacities include fixed assets such as machinery left unused and unmaintained and projects and production lines still under implementation.

The report attributed this dangerous phenomenon to a mix of factors, foremost among which are lack of cash liquidity, the absence of prompt maintenance and renovation and the importing of unnecessary equipment and machinery. It also blamed a lack of thorough feasibility studies, complicated licencing procedures and marketing difficulties. The CAA report estimated the value of unutilised capacities in 291 public sector companies, plus 54 newly privatised joint-stock companies, at LE8 billion, up from LE6.9 billion in 1995.

Tolba Eweida, chairman of the Plan and Budget Committee, urged the government to speed up privatisation programmes of public sector companies. He also called for tightened controls on production quality, and the adoption of more economical methods in marketing, production and purchasing operations. "Unless running of public sector companies in the coming period becomes based on economic and profitability criteria, the government could face greater difficulties in negotiating good privatisation deals on these companies," Eweida warned.

Promoting the free market

A MAJOR proponent of free market economics last week advised Egypt that the best way to privatise public-sector companies is to sell them to anyone who wants to buy, regardless of their nationality.

Otto Count Lambsdorff, a former minister of economic affairs in Germany and chairman of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, spoke to **Niveen Wahish** during a visit to Cairo. Privatisation, he said, is an essential precondition for forming an Arab common market. "If you do not roll back government intervention in the economy, you will never reach a competitive situation and will never achieve an Arab common market."

He advised that Egypt should follow the Estonian model of privatisation, where "whoever was interested and could afford to, was allowed to buy."

He added that "one should never give in to nationalist arguments that selling to foreigners is a sell-out of national interest."

Lambsdorff also pointed out that opening up companies to foreign ownership will bring in capital which is needed to develop industries, create jobs and make new investments.

Lambsdorff stressed the importance of privatising infrastructure projects as well. He praised the Egyptian government's move to privatise the telecommunications authority, saying that it will be "good for the people." Referring to the privatisation of the German telecommunications authority which was only completed last year, he said that simple services such as local and transatlantic calls have become cheaper. "We should have started earlier," he admitted. He added that "selling the company did not mean losing a source of revenue for the government, because it brought in a lot of cash."

Lambsdorff also called for reform of the European Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). "It is an enormous obstacle to better trade relations with other parts of the world."

He said, "We cannot expose our agriculture to full worldwide competition, but what we are doing is going too far. Subsidising agricultural production and exports is destroying Third World markets. We have to scale down the money we pay for the CAP." In widening the membership of the EU, a number of countries are likely to join whose economies are heavily dependent on agriculture, such as Poland.

"If Poland joins the EU, and our agricultural policy remains unchanged, the EU would go bankrupt the very same day."

Market report

Weavers win

THE MARKET continued to gain, its index capturing a 6.9 point increase to settle at 374.4 points in the week ending 19 March. With most of the traded shares making headway, the overall market turnover reached LE375 million.

The market welcomed Minister of Economy Youssef Boutros Ghali's latest decisions concerning new rules governing the implementation of Law 3 of 1998. The law gives companies traded in the market the green light to buy some shares, known as treasury shares, from the market to support their prices if an unjustified decline is seen. The new regulations commit these companies to disclose their purchase of treasury shares and divest them within a period not exceeding one year. They must also prepare their balance sheets and annual reports on their activities within a maximum two-month period after the end of their fiscal year.

The market had several shining stars this week; the brightest was Oriental Weavers which dominated the market in terms of both the value and volume of traded shares. The company's transactions amounted to LE45 million, thereby cornering 12.03 per cent of the overall market turnover.

The Suez Canal Insurance Company registered the market's highest increase, with its share value ending 27.4 per cent higher to close at LE27.69. On the other hand, the Arab Cotton Ginning Company suffered the heaviest loss, losing 9.72 per cent before settling at LE57.

Out of the 157 companies which traded through the week, 94 gained ground, 27 lost ground and the rest maintained their opening prices.

Shares and wares at Egypt's Doha stall

At the Third Dubai Shopping Festival, Egypt is selling everything from porcelain pots to public sector companies. **Sherine Nasr** talked to some of the eager participants

This is the first time that Egypt has been invited to participate in the Dubai Shopping Festival which is set to run until 18 April.

"This is perhaps one of the biggest and most famous shopping festivals worldwide," said Khadiga Kamal, festivals and conferences manager at the Federation of Egyptian Industries (FEI).

Under the title, "Discover Egypt", a whole week has been dedicated to the exhibition of a wide range of Egyptian industries, including textiles, ceramics, building materials, petrochemicals and electronics. Tourist development companies, banks and brokerage companies are also taking part in the event.

For businessmen, industrialists and bankers, the festival is seen as a golden opportunity — the largest annual gathering of trade and business in the region. According to Ahmed Khorshid, FEI executive manager, the festival was visited by about 106 million people last year. The total value of the trades and contracts completed was $900 million. This year, the organisers expect this figure to jump to $1350 million.

Because Dubai is the gateway to the other Arab Gulf countries as well as Asia Minor, it was important to be highly selective in deciding which companies and which commodities would represent Egypt. "There are 100 Egyptian companies representing the public and private sectors. Only very high-quality and exportable products were selected," said Khadiga.

Among the participants is the Egyptian Resort Company (ERC). "We are trying to market the area of Sahl Hashish which is one of the biggest tourist development projects on the Red Sea coast," said Kamel Mursi, ERC public relations manager. Sahl Hashish is now emerging as an integrated tourist zone with 14 hotels, villas, golf courses and a shopping centre. "We have successfully taken on the double task of promoting the area to tourists as well as attracting more Arab and foreign investors to buy land and start their tourist projects there," said Mursi.

Banks and brokerage companies are participating for the first time in a shopping festival. "Businessmen will make use of the facilities provided by the banks in completing their deals," said Ahmed Rashed, head of the Inspection Department at Misr Exterior Bank.

Banks have been at work ahead of the event, encouraging Egyptian participants to open accounts so as to facilitate their negotiations in Dubai. They have also been trying to attract Egyptian expatriates' funds back to the homeland. "Our presence will provide a good opportunity for Egyptian expatriates who want to open an account in an Egyptian bank but have lacked the necessary facilities," he said.

Out of the 120 brokerage companies in Egypt, seven were selected to take part in the event. "It is important to give a comprehensive image of the stock exchange and the latest plans to improve its performance," said Atef El-Hag of the Arab Markets Group, a brokerage company. Seminars are also being held to answer the questions of those interested in investing in one of the 34 public sector companies slated for privatisation through the stock market in 1998. "We have managed to acquire complete files on the financial status of all these companies and will be able to provide our clients with much useful information," El-Hag said.

El-Hag believes the festival to be particularly significant for brokerage companies. "After the latest plunge in the Southeast Asia market, investors are looking for an alternative. This is a good time to direct their attention to the still emerging, yet promising market in Egypt," said El-Hag.

A stock exchange on-line facility will also be offered. "All the transactions on the Cairo stock exchange will be displayed on huge screens as they happen," he said.

As part of the Egyptian week, a conference entitled "Egypt: The Emerging Market" was held on 23 and 24 March to discuss new business opportunities in Egypt. At its four sessions, businessmen from different sectors were able to discuss with Egyptian experts issues of foreign investments in Egypt, joint ventures in the newly developed areas, privatisation and investment opportunities in the capital market.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**

هكذا من الأصل

-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life



One of the major aims of the 1952 Egyptian Revolution that overthrew the monarchy was to limit agrarian land ownership, fragmenting large holdings and distributing expropriated land among poor peasants at an average of five feddans each. The idea was to end a feudal system under which big landowners dominated the rural population. Forty years earlier, the Cairo government adopted a somewhat similar step but for a different reason. A 1912 law prohibited the confiscation of small land holdings of up to five feddans in repayment of debts owed to greedy usurers, mostly foreigners, who charged exorbitant interest rates. **Dr Yunan Labib Rizk** tells the story of the old law on the basis of reports published by *Al-Ahram*

Illustration: Makram Henein

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The 1912 law was inspired by legislarive experiences in other countries, notably the homestead laws in the US, the law of immune family assets in France and the Punjab land alienation act. Kitchner, in his report, wrote that the aim of the law was "to protect the small farmer who owns up to five feddans of land from the confiscation of his land, home and agricultural tools as a way of exacting payment for his debt. However, this does not prevent the farmer from selling his land if he so wishes or from obtaining loans against his crops. The law does not apply to debts incurred prior to its promulgation."

Given the profound ramifications on the law, not only to that broad segment of the rural populace, but the productive rural sector, *Al-Ahram* was quick to engage in the heated debate precipitated by the new measure. In view of its lengthy record for defending the interests of the rural poor, an advocacy that threatened the newspaper with closure on more than one occasion, *Al-Ahram's* stance on the controversial new law was surprising. On 26 June 1912, under the headline "Prohibition against sequestration of five feddans", the newspaper devoted itself to expressing its reservations concerning the new law.

Its first concern was that moneylenders would refuse to lend the farmers money. Before bringing the law into effect, it advises, "the government should first take the necessary measures to protect the peasants from the prospect of bankruptcy, as the peasant is in constant need of money in order to cultivate his land and fulfil his needs."

It then discusses the advantages and disadvantages for the peasant of borrowing from the moneylenders as opposed to taking out loans from government institutions. Curiously, the comparison comes out heavily in favour of the moneylenders. It writes: "No one disputes the fact that usury saps the national wealth. In an effort to save the peasant from the extortion of the money-lenders, Lord Cromer founded the Agrarian Bank so that they might take out loans at smaller interest rates. Unfortunately, the Bank failed to fulfil its promise. Taking out loans from the Bank required lengthy and complicated procedures.

Also, unlike the usurer, the Bank would countenance no delay or procrastination on the due date for repayment of the loans, and once the due date passed without payment, the bank would put up the land used as collateral for sale. The usurer by contrast is more accommodating to the needs of the peasant, offering him a measure of leniency and clemency during hard times.

The newspaper's second concern was that the new law would not be enforced retroactively. "Debtors will be running to the courts to fix the due dates on their loans, which amount to some six million pounds."

Thirdly, it argued, the provision that the farmer can still put his land up for sale "will bring unparalleled catastrophe not only upon the small farmer but upon the more affluent farmer as well. Since the new law does nothing to meet the farmers' need for money, the land will eventually slip out of the hands of the very people the law is intended to protect and into the grip of the rich."

The more sensible solution, it contends, would be to establish agricultural unions and agrarian cooperative funds before the law is put into effect. The unions would serve as a form of "school in which the farmer would learn how to plan and economise and how to make more effective decisions in the selection of seeds and fertilisers." The cooperatives would serve as "storehouses that would meet the needs of the farmers unconditionally." Once such institutions are in place, the new law would provide incentive to the farmers to join the unions and cooperatives, "thus creating a powerful economic entity that has the entire Egyptian nation as its backbone."

Simultaneously, the newspaper warns, "to bring the law into effect before such syndicates are in place is to build the house from the top down. A solid structure can only survive on a sound basis."

Al-Ahram was not alone in expressing its anxieties with regard to the new law. In Alexandria the chairmen of the British, French, Austrian, Italian, and Greek chambers of commerce convened an urgent meeting attended by representatives of various import-export companies and the General Produce Company. The resolution they drafted was diplomatically worded, but to the point: "The motive which inspired the government to promulgate this law is most noble and honourable. All measures intended to alleviate the debts shouldered by the peasants are most welcome by the circles of commerce. However, to impose this law suddenly could be very hazardous for trade." The resolution also provided that the chairmen of the chambers of commerce write to their respective consuls urging them to intercede with the aim of securing a delay in the implementation of the law "so as to allow commercial agencies sufficient time to study the effects of the law more closely."

The promulgation of the new law precipitated a panicked rush of creditors to their lawyers in the pursuit of advice on what they should do about the loans they had made to farmers. *Al-Ahram's* correspondent in Alexandria filed a series of reports on the charged atmosphere in circles associated with the cotton commerce as a result of the anxieties provoked by the law.

In his report of 4 July 1912, for example, he writes, "This law will not live long as it obstructs the natural machinery of commercial give and take. Alexandria is a thriving environment for commerce and finance and its role in Egyptian interactions and transactions should not be underestimated."

So concerned were foreign financiers in Alexandria that the new law would sabotage the machinery of capitalism from which they garnered their enormous profits that they went into action. Shortly after the new law was announced, four representatives from the Syndicate of Import-Export Merchants travelled to Cairo to meet with Lord Kitchner in order to prevail upon him to annul the law. The British high commissioner told them, "The law was promulgated for a noble end and I am unable to change it. There have been many exaggerated claims regarding the effects of this law when put into effect. However, a similar law was enacted in the Punjab where it brought very satisfactory results, one of which was that the price of land increased." After their meeting with Kitchner, the representatives announced that he had told them that all he could do was to postpone the implementation of the law for three years, during which time the peasants should be able to meet their current debts.

Whether their announcement was true or not, it gave renewed hope to the foreign merchants in Alexandria. As *Al-Ahram's* correspondent in Alexandria reported, "The opinion here is that the postponement is the prelude to annulment or neglect of the new law, since the peasant is always incurring debts and will be unable to meet his debts in three years."

Several days later another delegation of Alexandrian merchants went to Cairo in order to exert more pressure on the high commissioner. Once again, the meeting inspired a wave of optimism among foreign merchants in the port city.

In addition to the residence of the high commissioner, representatives of commercial interests also knocked on the doors of various ministers.

One of those lobbied was Lord Cecil, deputy minister of finance at the time, who told his petitioners, "The Egyptian government does not want to prejudice the interests of anyone in this country. It is as concerned with commerce as it is with agriculture. If the government is contemplating rendering five feddans of the land of the peasant immune to sequestration, that its because it wants to protect a portion of the wealth of the peasant who is the pillar of the national wealth."

The British commissioner found that he had to act quickly to dispel the cloud of pessimism that seemed to be accumulating once again. His short-term measure consisted of making reassuring noises to the effect that the new law would not reduce rents and that the current costs of cultivation would always compel the farmers to take out loans, using their crops as collateral. The long-term measure was to commission a survey of that sector of the countryside targeted by the new law. The results were revealing: Although the law was intended to protect farmers owning five feddans or less, it transpired that the average small holding was no more than one feddan. The survey listed a total of 619.107 small landowners owning a total acreage of 619,214 feddans. Furthermore, according to the survey, this class was indebted to the tune of LE15,990,660, meaning that each peasant had an average debt of LE25 per feddan of land, an enormous sum give the price of land at the time.

With such solid evidence in hand, Kitchner had the ammunition to go forward with the new law. *Al-Ahram* reported him as saying, "It is apparent from this survey that an enormous debt of approximately LE16 million is being shouldered by the poorest tillers of the soil in this country. In view of the fact that the average feddan carries a debt of LE25 and that the rates of interest are very high, we find that these financial circumstances are intolerable for a great number of landowners. The Five-Feddan Law will safeguard the property of the peasant from being used as a means to pay back debts. Without this law, the consequences would have been dire indeed."

The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.



estment returns in Egypt

ikh Salih Kamel stated that the investment re-
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Egypt occupies second place after Saudi Arabia
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Money & Business

Economic cooperation between Egypt and the G-15

WITHIN the framework of the preparatory meetings of the G-15 — due in Cairo in May — the foreign trade sector, affiliated with the Ministry of Trade and Supply, has begun to prepare an overall concept for the best way of promoting cooperation between members of the group. This involves strengthening unity between Egypt and group members, as well as lifting obstacles to cooperation.

The mechanism to be suggested by the ministry during the meetings will be to establish joint committees of businessmen in Egypt and other member countries, in addition to the establishment of joint financial institutions to cover commercial and non-commercial risks.

offers credit card with electronic memory

IN LINE with its endeavours to keep abreast with the latest banking technologies and to provide its clients with state-of-the-art services, the National Bank of Egypt (NBE) is joining the global trend of replacing money with safe and smart credit cards.

In this respect, NBE has recently obtained the approval of Mondex International for it to offer its services in the Egyptian market from the beginning of next year.

The Mondex card is the latest generation of plastic cards and is considered the most advanced payment system offered to bank customers — especially in the USA. The new card is a smart credit card with an electronic memory that stores the customer's account and personal data, not to mention the possibility of storing balances in five different currencies — hence making it accessible worldwide.

The new credit card accepts cash transactions of any volume. Moreover, it is simpler to use — in both small and major transactions — since it electronically transfers money from one account to another, without having to pass through the computer system of the bank. Commercial institutions can benefit from this card at their points of sale since the debit and credit movements are both carried out and then stored in the electronic memory of the machine in the space of three seconds — as long as the required cash is available.

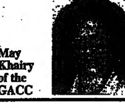
In actual fact, the Mondex is considered the safest and most secure alternative to money. It can be used by all customers regardless of their income bracket or credit worthiness. Thus, it envisages encouraging its users to transfer their income — salary, pension etc. — to the bank itself.

The new credit card is highly secured against computer hackers. Its security is based on the individuality and unity of every transaction in terms of value, currency, date, cards used and the serial number of each transaction. All these factors constitute the distinguishing code of every transaction that prevents any kind of hacking. The electronic memory of the new card provides the utmost security, since it is designed to make any kind of forgery simply impossible.

NBE currently dominates 70 per cent of the credit card market in Egypt. It has issued some 60,000 Visa cards between the period January 1994 to December 1997 and launched 10,000 Mastercards in 1997 alone. NBE also plans to introduce another 600 Automatic Teller Machines (ATMs) by the year 2000.

Egypt spreads its wings over German international fairs

A GREAT number of Egyptian companies are taking part in several international fairs to be held in Germany this year. The city of Cologne will be the location for a number of international exhibitions, among which is the International Fair — taking place from 12-16 May 1998 — which will include over 18 exhibiting countries. The exhibition will present the latest inventions and technologies used in recycling waste and protecting the environment and will incorporate a number of conferences and seminars on related issues.



May Khairy of the GACC

According to May Khairy, head of exhibitions at the German Arab Chamber of Commerce, the chamber is offering facilities and services to all Egyptian participants.

Also scheduled for Egyptian participation is the international exhibition on wires, cables and pipes in Dusseldorf from 20-24 April and an exhibition on baked products and related equipment from 8-14 May.

Additionally, Cologne will once again be the site for the International Fotokina exhibition — 16-21 September — which will include the latest innovations in the field of cinema, video filming, studio equipment and theatre technology.

Al-Ahram Weekly

Stuck in the mud

In any given political situation, one can be sure that Israel is exerting every possible effort to extract extra benefits and bonuses. In this pursuit, Israel uses many pretexts, foremost among them what it calls national security.

When Israel withdrew from practically all of Sinai in 1982 following its peace treaty with Egypt, it held on to Taba at the northern tip of the Gulf of Aqaba, despite universal acknowledgement that the enclave belongs to Egypt. There were four years of haggling before the case went to the International Court of Justice, which restored Taba to Egypt.

In 1978, Israel occupied a strip of territory in southern Lebanon, claiming it needed a buffer zone to protect its northern border against attack. Now it is offering to withdraw — in return for what it calls security guarantees from both Lebanon and Syria. These guarantees include the dismantling of Hizbullah's bases in south Lebanon and protection for the South Lebanon Army, the Israeli-sponsored militia. The Israeli proposal is also aimed at separating the Lebanese and Syrian tracks in the peace process. Lebanon and Syria have repeatedly affirmed that they will move together in the peace process, and have rejected Israel's proposal, insisting that Israel withdraw unconditionally, in compliance with Security Council Resolution 425.

Israel has about 1,500 troops in the 15km-deep belt it occupies in south Lebanon. Almost daily attacks by Hizbullah guerrillas have proved to be a drain on Israel, especially in human terms. Last year, 39 Israeli soldiers were killed and hundreds were wounded. These losses have fuelled controversy in Israel, where many are now questioning the wisdom of keeping troops in south Lebanon. Last week, protesters outside Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's office in Jerusalem smeared themselves with mud to illustrate Israel's plight. "Basically, we are stuck in the mud, and it is time to leave," said Linda Ben-Zvi, spokeswoman for the protesters.

Israel could have come to the same conclusion long ago.

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Al-Ahram Offices

Main office
AL-AHRAM, Al-Galaa St. Cairo.
Telephones: 5786100/5786200/5786300/5786400/5786500. Direct: 5786064
Telex: 20185/93346 Fax:5786089 /5786833
E-mail: weekly@ahram.org.eg

Overseas offices

USA
Washington DC: Atef El-Ghamri, Al-Ahram Office, Suite 1258, 529 National Press Bldg, Washington DC 20045; Tel: (202)-737-2121/2122.
New York: Atef El-Ghamri, Al-Ahram Office, 39th Fl., Chrysler Bldg., 405 Lexington Ave, New York, NY 10174-0300; Tel: (212)972 6440; Telex: 497 9426 ITT U.I.; Fax: (212) 286 0285.
Los Angeles: Soraya Aboul Seoud, 600 S. Curson Ave., 402 LA, CA 90036, USA; Tel: (213)-857-0941; Fax: (213)-857-7084.

Russia
Moscow: Abdel-Malek Khalil, Ahram Office, Kutuzovski Pro Dom 7/4 Kv. 50, Moscow; Tel: 243 4014/ 243 1424; Fax: 230 2879

Canada
Montreal: Mustafa Samy Sadek, Al-Ahram Office, 800 Rene-Levesque Blvd, West Suite 2440, Montreal H3B IX9, Quebec; Tel: (514)876 7825 Fax: (514) 876 9262/ (514)876 7825.

United Kingdom
London: Amr Abdel-Samie, Al-Ahram Office, 203 - 209 North Gower street London NW1 2NJ
Tel: 0171 388 1155, Fax: 0171 388 3130

France
Paris: Sherif El-Shoubashy, Bureau Al-Ahram 26, Rue Marbeuf, 75008 Paris; Tel: (1) 537 72700; Al-Ahram F.; Fax: (1) 428-93963.

Germany
Frankfurt: Mohamed Eissa El-Sharkawi, Al-Ahram Bureau Friedrichstr. 15, 60323 Frankfurt, Tel: (069) 9714380/ (069) 9714381 Fax: (069) 729571.

Austria
Vienna: Mustafa Abdalla, 2331 Vosendorf Orts Str. 253; Tel: 692965/ 694805; Telex: 13 2726 GIGI A; Telefax: 694805.

Greece
Athens: Abdel-Azim Darwish, 69 Solonos St., Third floor, Kolonaki 106-79, Athens, Greece. Tel. and Fax :3634503.

Italy
Rome: Mustafa Abdallah [S.A.B. 2000] 00191 ROMA-V. Guido Bant, 34. Tel: 3332250 Fax: 3332294

Japan
Tokyo: Mohamed El-Dessouki, Duke Aoyama 4-11, Higashi 4 - Chome Shibuya - Ku, Room 402, Tokyo; Tel: (03) 340 63944; Fax: (03) 340 6625

South Africa
Johannesburg: Mohamed Sabreen, Oxford Manor, 196 Oxford road-Northland 2116, Johannesburg. Tel.and Fax: (011)4477425.

Brazil
Rio de Janeiro: Ahmed Shedid, Cx. Postal 2395, CEP. 20001.

The devil you know

Recent Senate discussions on the future of Iraq highlight the differences between rhetoric and reality in American foreign policy, writes **Ibrahim Nafie**



I have been engrossed by the recent debate in the US Senate on the possibilities of resolving the problems that exist between the US and Iraq. The general line of argument is to hold that only with the application of democracy will Iraq be able to achieve stability, prosperity and normal relations with other countries of the world.

What was noteworthy was that Congressmen offered their opinions about how to bring about this goal without the slightest reference to the role the Iraqi people might play in the process. One would naturally imagine that the people of any country would constitute the foundation of whatever democratic system they introduce or sustain. Is a new form of democracy being hatched for the people of the Middle East — democracy the American way?

The Senate debate reflected one aspect of America's double standards towards the Arab world. US congressmen are clearly operating on the premise that participation in the democratic process is a purely American prerogative and that the democracy of other countries must be made in the US.

Discussions on democracy in Iraq came in the context of Senate hearings on extending the scope of the US confrontation with Iraq from the threat of air strikes to debilitate the regime of Saddam Hussein to overthrowing the regime entirely. The Senate members were of one mind — the overthrow of the regime should be America's aim. And once again, without exception, they made no reference to the role of the Iraqi people in this process. Any alternative to Iraq's regime must be routed through the US, whether through Washington backing one of the Iraqi opposition factions, or by fostering conditions for a coup d'etat that would supplant Saddam.

The US had entertained such thoughts at the end of the Gulf War when it sought to lend its support to the amalgamation of Iraqi opposition forces in the Iraqi National Congress (INC). The US administration had hoped that the INC would be instrumental in encouraging elements close to the centre of power in Iraq to overthrow Saddam Hussein and take power. However, once the US perceived that the opposition inside Iraq was growing too powerful and threatened a comprehensive popular revolution rather than a limited coup, it withdrew its support from the INC. The justification for this change of heart, as it was explained by foreign policy experts, was that the American government feared that a popular revolution representing Iraq's diverse ethnic and denominational groups would precipitate separatist movements and the eventual partition of Iraq into several states. This in turn would generate turmoil in neighboring nations such as Iran, Syria and Turkey, which have similar sectarian and ethnic divisions. In other words, the establishment of democracy by the people — according to the American line — would jeopardise the stability of the entire region, while a new regime brought in by a coup d'etat would ensure that Iraq accommodates the US while being less troublesome to its neighbours.

That such double standards still prevail in American thinking is fostered by two factors. Firstly, the US is still unsure what rules to apply in the post-Cold War era. Ten years after the fall of the Berlin Wall the US government still lends its backing to dictatorial regimes. The promises made at the end of the Cold War to make democracy in the world America's number one foreign policy objective appear to have been consigned to oblivion.

What could illustrate this more tangibly than the fact that the US included the Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic as a party to the Dayton Peace Agreement in Bosnia two years ago? Milosevic was notorious for his policy of "ethnic cleansing" and the atrocities he committed against Bosnians. Yet the US remains content to keep him in power.

Successive US administrations, whether Democratic or Republican, have been given to the curious and dangerous fear that a bad ruler must inevitably be succeeded by someone worse. It is therefore safer to keep a dictator in power rather than risk the prospect of destabilising a region by overthrowing him. This "devil you know" policy subverts any possible substance to the American claim to giving democracy and human rights top priority in its foreign policy, since clearly the US' overriding concern is to safeguard the stability of US interests, even if that means backing dictatorships in other countries.

The second factor to nurture US double standards is that US policy-makers have little knowledge of the domestic circumstances and national cultures of other countries. In the case of Iraq, American fears that a revolution would spark separatist movements are unfounded. US policy-makers are clearly unaware of the long history of coexistence among Iraq's diverse ethnic and religious communities. These communities have an ancient tradition of voluntarily shared economic and cultural life and there has always been a formula for maintaining an equilibrium among them in the distribution of authority.

The diverse opposition groups that coalesced under the INC at the end of the Gulf War were known to have sharp differences of opinion and to represent divergent spheres of interest. Yet, in spite of these differences they struck a consensus which they felt was binding on them all: to remain united in a single, undivided Iraq.

Democracy, therefore, is the way to strengthen the bonds between the Iraqi people, not to divide them, as American thinking would have it. In fact, the belief that the US can monopolise the right to choose the system of government for the Iraqi people constitutes the shortest route possible to the partition of Iraq and the kind of regional destabilisation that the US wants to avoid.

Water shortage [2]

As long as scarcity remains the rule, writes **Mohamed Sid-Ahmed**, the other will continue to be perceived as the enemy

After first warning that a 1.6-mile-wide asteroid might pass as close as 50,000km from Earth on 26 October 2028, and that the possibility of an actual collision could not be discounted, scientists quickly amended their original calculations to reassure a worried world that the asteroid would miss Earth by one million kilometres. Still, the threat of direct collisions has not disappeared, if not with this asteroid then with other huge rocks crossing Earth's orbit.

Indeed, there are more than 50 recorded instances of asteroid strikes, the most famous being the one which fell on the Bay of Yucatan some 65 million years ago and which is believed to be responsible for the extinction of the dinosaur and other species. Among the planetary defensive measures currently under study is the possibility of launching nuclear warheads to intercept objects hurtling towards Earth in order to deflect them from their course or to explode them in outer space. In all cases, we still have 30 years to develop technology to ensure that the strike will be effective.

Thanks to modern technology, we are now in a position to predict natural disasters and, occasionally, to avert them in time. But the latest asteroid scare underscores the vulnerability of life on Earth as it continues to face new challenges every day. A challenge that is no less threatening to our survival than celestial bodies slamming into our planet is the growing scarcity of water. The threat is particularly acute in the Middle East, where the rapid depletion of fresh water sources, coupled with a manifest inability to reach agreement on contentious issues, makes water wars a very real prospect.

The Middle East is characterised by two main features: one is that it is largely desert, the other is that it houses the world's largest known oil reserves. At the same time, it is not immune to the global demographic explosion, and population density in some of the arable areas of the Middle East is becoming critically high. The region's vast deserts can accommodate its present population many times over, but first they must be rendered hospitable for human life. While greening the desert is a costly proposition, thanks to oil revenues it need not be out of reach.

The region was not always barren. According to one theory, the Indian subcontinent was once separate from Asia. Its gradual gravitation towards the mainland led to a collision that was, even in terms of a geological timeframe, extremely violent. As the two land masses slammed together, the Himalayan mountain range, the highest in the world, emerged. By obstructing the direction of winds, this towering barrier turned areas previously blessed with rain into arid deserts. The rich flora and fauna that once graced much of the territory now known as Arab land sank under inflowing sands and became petroleum. Arab land that was not exposed to the invading sands remained green.

In the modern period, Arab deserts with rich oil reserves led to the emergence of oil states with sparse populations but great wealth, while areas blessed with substantial greenland but not with the geological boon enjoyed by their desert neighbours saw the emergence of Arab states with large populations and little wealth. Thus an inbuilt contradiction bedevils the Arab nation, divided as it is between states with big populations and little wealth and others with just the opposite. This contradiction stands as a formidable obstacle in the way of achieving Arab unity. It is also being exploited by Israel to assert its presence in the heart of the Arab nation without having to make the necessary "concessions" that an equitable peace would require.

The Paris conference last week focused attention on the fact that scarcity of water, at both the regional and global levels, has attained unprecedented proportions. It is hard to see how the peace process can move forward at a time the threat of water wars looms over the Middle East, where the search for fresh water sources is a frustrating exercise in futility. In fact, water can be a pivotal factor in aborting the peace process altogether and sparking new reasons for the renewal of conflict, not limited this time to Israel and its Arab neighbours, but extending to include other parties. One such party could be Turkey, whose recent rapprochement with Israel cannot be explained only in terms of a geo-strategic alliance in face of the Arab world, but is closely linked to the incipient water crisis.

It is safe to assume from all of the foregoing that, as long as the region continues to suffer from scarcity of water, peace will remain out of reach, particularly between Arabs and Israelis. Scarcity is bound to make the original inhabitants feel that they are being forced to share the little they have with people who have descended on them from outside their world, who are, as such, aggressors. As long as scarcity remains the rule, as long as deserts continue to cover most of the Arab land mass and as long as water is scarce, the other will continue to be perceived as the enemy. For peace to prevail, water must become plentiful.

Israel's founding fathers were European Jews who fled from the persecution to which they were subjected in Europe — particularly under the Nazis. Zionism was predicated on the notion of establishing a homeland for the Jews in a region lying at the heart of the Arab nation, whose original inhabitants were in no way responsible for the suffering of the Jews.

That is why it is hard to imagine the Arabs coming to terms with the presence of Israel in their midst unless Israel can make itself more of an asset than a liability in their eyes. In other words, Israel cannot live in peace in the Middle East unless it convinces the Arabs that what it has brought into the region is not only Jewish refugees, but a part of Europe, which can contribute effectively towards raising the standard of the region, economically, socially and institutionally. This is the price Israel must pay if it wants a durable peace in the region, especially in the context of the growing shortage of water.

However, if Israel enjoys a qualitative edge over the Arabs, as represented in its technological superiority, this is offset by the quantitative superiority the Arabs enjoy over Israel, represented in the huge reservoirs of oil lying under Arab land, which can finance the invention of new technologies to desalinate sea water at a fraction of the current cost, and vast expanses of territory, on which can be set up panels to harness solar energy. Experts reckon that three rows of solar panels set up along the southern shores of the Mediterranean, from Casablanca in the west to Rafah in the east, would produce four times as much energy as that now consumed by the whole of Europe. In the context of available technologies, however, this is a necessary but not sufficient condition, for the technology by which this dream can become reality has yet to be developed.

For all that Israel enjoys an undeniable advantage in this field, it is not the only source of technological know-how. Nor, for that matter, is the United States. France, for one, has achieved impressive results in the area of water research. The Marseilles-based World Council of Water, headed by Egypt's current Minister of Public Works Mahmoud Abu Zeid, has the resources to mount an international project to develop water resources, whether by traditional or non-traditional means. Modern technology has proved itself capable of sparing the world from disasters raining down from the sky: surely it should be able to protect us from horrors closer to home, specifically those resulting from human conflict. The question is whether we will move before it is too late.

Matters of the heart

By Naguib Mahfouz

I studied philosophy at university, and I have been writing novels and philosophical works since 1929. These two fields of interest proceeded along parallel lines, and I had no idea at first what course my life would take. This prolonged indecision tore me, and I made a heart-wrenching attempt to discover what I really wanted to do. It took quite some soul-searching, but finally, early in 1936, I came to a decision: I would become a novelist, I determined, and keep my fascination with philosophy, among other cultural interests, on the side-lines. While I would not banish these interests from my horizon, I resolved, I would devote my life to one of my passions, no more.

Both literature and philosophy are retreating before the materialism which dominates our lives today. I did not choose literature because, having weighed it against philosophy, I found it more advantageous. I chose literature because of emotional, affective reasons, not cold calculation.

Art and literature will both survive, however, because human beings cannot relinquish matters of the heart. The problem resides in finding the channels to transmit art to an audience, difficult as this attempt may seem in a consumerist society dominated by materialism and coming to terms with life's many harsher realities. While I may seem something of an idealist, the artist must remain true to his artistic self and never bend to commercial considerations.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week — Cook's roasting

Al-Ahram Al-Arabi: "The European initiative has yet to crystallise. The Europeans want it to be harmonious with American thinking but, at the moment, it is simply broad lines without going into too much detail. I think that Robin Cook's tour of the region will pave the way for the initiative's final form. It is clear that the Europeans want to cooperate with the US and I think they will wait for American ideas before launching their own initiative."
(Osama El-Baz, 21 March)

Al-Ahali: "In its capacity as current president of the European Union, Britain is seeking to find a way to resume the [peace] negotiations. In this, it is very well suited for the role since its experience and diplomatic skills far outstrip those of any other Western country. But Israel and the US see eye to eye on most issues. Will Britain thus remain silent over Netanyahu's intransigence and his defiance of the world at large?"
(Mohamed Sid-Ahmed, 18 March)

Akhbar El-Yom: "I am naive enough to believe that Britain, which was once Great Britain, would have taken offence at its foreign minister being humiliated and would recall its ambassador to Israel. But alas, Britain did not take offence nor did it reply. In fact, it washed the episode down with a glass of Scotch. Worse, Tony Blair declared the other day that he would be visiting Israel. I hope that Mr Blair gets the same treatment and leaves Israel without a goodbye. This is all fitting for a nation like Britain for all the crimes it has afflicted upon the Palestinians."
(Mahmoud El-Saadany, 21 March)

Akhbar El-Yom: "All the political acrobatics being carried out by Netanyahu and his allies will produce nothing new. The aim is nothing save wasting time and keeping up the pretense that the peace process is still alive and that Israel is serious about reaching a settlement. But the whole world knows that the peace process died quite some time ago. And since Netanyahu has full US support to impose the logic of force in the region, he has every right to humiliate Britain's foreign secretary for daring to address the Palestinian issue during his visit to Jebel Abu Ghneim in Jerusalem."
(Galal Aref, 21 March)

Al-Wafd: "We are pleased with the positive role and efforts played by Kofi Annan in defusing the US-Iraqi crisis and we are hoping that he will now devote his attention to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Perhaps he can get Israel to discharge its commitments to the Arabs. But it seems that the UN nowadays is a US instrument by which to get the world to bow before US hegemony and to teach its opponents a lesson."
(Editorial, 21 March)

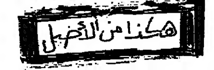
Al-Gomhuria: "When Kofi Annan says he has no intention of imposing himself or taking over the role of the US, we would like to say that it is not a question of imposition. It is more about carrying out a UN function to protect international legality and uphold its resolutions. This is a role Annan cannot back out of. And both the US and the UN have distinct roles to play. One cannot play the role of the other."
(Mohamed Abu Hadid, 19 March)

October: "Since Netanyahu took over as prime minister he has met Arafat only rarely and signed the Hebron Accord only after acts of violence endangered the security of Israel. The last time an effort was made to push the peace process was when Albright visited the region in September. But the visit culminated in nothing but a few statements and meetings and had no positive effect of any kind. The peace process has ground to a halt for lack of energy to push it forward. Can the recent events on Palestinian soil provide the impetus to push the peace process forward once again?"
(Salah Montasser, 22 March)

*Compiled by **Galal Nassar***



Dennis Ross reminds me of nothing so much as a lonely actor on an empty stage, peering across the footlights in search of the director. He blinks and rubs his eyes, rimmed by long, lush lashes, but sees only a series of confused images. He strains to hear, but only static surrounds him. Here, I have drawn him with his long chin poised precariously on folded hands, more forlorn than glum. Even his tie seems downcast.



Close up

Salama A. Salama

Quicks and storms

The storm stirred up by "the revival of the peace process" has created an absurd, albeit very revealing, situation. Israel, which totally rejects either international peace-making efforts or American and European initiatives, has placed the US, which single-handedly dominates the new world order, in a most unenviable position.

As the Middle East staggered in the sandstorm, three capitals solemnly received Robin Cook, visiting in his capacity as the EU's envoy. The second visitor to the region was Kofi Annan, whose visit reflected the UN's responsibility for peace initiatives and conflict management in the region. The third visitor was the Austrian chancellor, whose country will replace Britain as head of the EU in the second half of this year, and who restricted his visit to Israel and Gaza.

The media, as well as unidentified diplomatic sources, speculated that a European initiative was in the pipeline. But in no time it became clear that the initiative was no more than a testing of the water. This truth was made blindingly clear to Cook when he attempted to visit an Israeli settlement which was not on the itinerary prepared by the Israeli government. This incident, however, was nothing more than a diplomatic outburst, a British attempt to please an Arab audience. The visit was staged in the wake of Netanyahu's refusal to even listen to the EU's suggestions as represented by Cook — ideas developed, incidentally, in cooperation with Washington.

Kofi Annan on the other hand, made no attempt to please his Arab audience. He made it plain that he was bringing neither mediation proposals nor peace initiatives. He simply expressed his faith that the US was "doing its best". His visit, however, may be seen a spectacular defence of the UN's role. The visit of the Austrian dignitary and his statements, finally, were totally lost in the dust.

The diplomatic storm highlighted the Arabs' eagerness for an initiative, or at least a sign. Like a drowning nation, the Arabs are grasping for straws. No one even asked the EU envoy about how the EU plans to address Israeli intransigence, given that 40 per cent of Israel's exports are destined for European markets, and that the Israeli-EU partnership agreement will open wide the gates of Europe to Israel.

The division of labour between Europe and the US, however, may be such that bringing pressure to bear on the Arabs and Palestinians is Europe's task (since Europe is funding a considerable number of projects in Palestinian territory), while the US takes complete charge of Israel.

The US today is shrinking slowly but surely, backtracking carefully for fear of kindling Netanyahu's anger. The Israeli premier has not minced his words in warning America against putting forth an initiative. The good news of European-American coordination which Cook bore, perceived as a stepping stone towards an American initiative simmering in the White House, is in fact only a ploy to appease the Arabs and deceive them into believing that an initiative is in the offing.

The US has already backed down. The offensive to revive the peace process suddenly turned into a defensive operation. The "imminent" US initiative has been postponed until Ross's visit to the Middle East. Israel has threatened to solicit the help of its supporters in Congress if the Clinton administration continues to bother it with suggestions that it withdraw from Palestinian territory even by a meager 13 per cent.

Certain analysts believe that US-EU coordination could pressure Israel to abide by its commitments to peace, much as the Dayton Accords pacified the Balkan dispute. But there is one difference. The Serbs do not govern from the White House or Congress, while the Israelis do, and the Balkan nations have not laid down their weapons, while the Arabs have done so already.



Soapbox

Democracy's armies

Despite many rumours that a new law on civil associations in is under preparation, the government remains silent. Such a law would be a true litmus test of the government's intentions towards democratisation in the country and the degree to which it is willing to uphold its commitments to international human rights standards and, indeed, the Egyptian Constitution.

The current law governing civil associations, Law 32 of 1964, was always intended as an instrument for tightening state control over civil society and abrogating freedoms of association and organisation. Law 32 gives the government, and in particular the Ministry of Social Affairs, sweeping and arbitrary powers over every form of civic association in the country. Government bodies have the right to dissolve associations, merge them, confiscate their funds and/or allocate them to other associations, dissolve their governing boards and appoint new ones...

The repeal of Law 32 and its replacement by a truly democratic legislation would directly affect hundreds of thousands of people in almost every walk of life.

Ultimately, the real question is participatory democracy. Democracy is an indivisible process. Defective democracy only encourages military or religious alternatives. Only through democracy are people empowered to protect themselves, provided they are aware and organised. It is only through true democracy that political and religious extremism can be contained, and the possibility of chaos deterred.



This week's Soapbox speaker is a lawyer and the director of the Legal Research and Resource Centre for Human Rights.

Amir Salem

Fighting apartheid, not occupation

It is not enough to wait for the balance of power to shift, writes **Mouin Rabbani**. Palestinians must work actively to promote their own agendas, if they are not to remain on the margins of others' designs

Almost from the moment it was signed on 13 September 1993, the Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements (DOP), or Oslo Agreement, has by common consensus been "in crisis" and "on the verge of collapse". Since the election of Binyamin Netanyahu as prime minister of Israel in May 1996, these dire warnings have gradually been replaced by the more morbid diagnoses of a "clinically dead" or, more simply, "deceased" process. Simultaneously, opportunities for renewed global euphoria and self-congratulation, such as that presented by the adoption of the Protocol Concerning the Redeployment in Hebron on 15 January 1997, are increasingly fewer, further between, and shorter in duration. Rather, it is the armed confrontations that erupted throughout the occupied Palestinian territories in September 1996 which are viewed as the shape of things to come.

From the perspective of Palestinian national rights and Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation, the above nuances are somewhat trivial, because Oslo was a dead letter from the outset. The essential prerequisite for a durable resolution of this conflict, Palestinian self-determination, was purposely left unmentioned in both the DOP and each of the subsequent Israeli-Palestinian agreements. No less importantly, these texts have consistently been implemented in a manner designed to make the prospects for its attainment ever more remote.

It is, in this respect, worth remembering that Oslo was the brainchild of the dovish wing of the Israeli Labour Party, that all but one of the relevant agreements were concluded prior to the November 1995 assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, and that, since his assumption of power, Netanyahu has made more compromises with Oslo than it has with him. In practical terms, Netanyahu's main deviation from his predecessors has been in the substantively insignificant realms of attitude and rhetoric. The more germane policies of accelerated colonisation, of economic warfare and systematic abuse of human rights, of an increasingly formalised system of apartheid, were, along with the fundamental Zionist principle of non-recognition of Palestinian national rights, inherited from the most left-wing government in Israeli history.

While the Netanyahu regime's manner is certainly more aggressive, hostile, and provocative than that of the suave Peres, the available evidence conclusively demonstrates that the former basically picked up where the latter left off. Repeated claims by the militant settler lobby that the previous government was in fact more responsive to their demands than the current one only serve to underline the point that, in its broad outlines, Netanyahu's programme is novel only insofar as it is being implemented by a novice.

While the crisis in Palestinian rights is real enough, it is not this which has been exercising the minds of most commentators and causing them to predict Armageddon. Rather, their concerns are for the integrity and sustainability of what is conventionally termed the peace process itself. In this view, a tangible, reciprocal, and, most importantly, dynamic process of expanding self-government for Palestinians and increasing security for Israelis, culminating in a permanent settlement based upon the principle of land for peace, forms the inviolable prerequisite for the successful implementation of Oslo.

From this perspective, the fundamental breakdown of the formula, symbolised by Israel's systematic procrastination in redeploying its forces away from Palestinian population centres, and represented most visibly by Palestinian suicide bombings in Israeli cities, is widely considered a harbinger of catastrophe. Some observers have opined that the relevant agreements are themselves too vague and self-contradictory to produce the required results, and were thus a recipe for failure all along. More often, however, the gloomy forecasts derive from a perceived refusal by the parties directly involved to respect deadlines and commitments explicitly agreed upon, and their violations of what is held to be the spirit of Oslo. Netanyahu's current insistence on retaining absolute control of at least 60 per cent of the West Bank at least throughout the interim phase, and his American patrons' refusal to force the implementation of the further redeployments agreed upon in the Hebron Protocol (and simultaneous insistence on a monopoly of sponsorship of the Oslo process), are likened to the final nail in the Nordic coffin.

To the extent that adherents Oslo view it as a framework for the comprehensive resolution of the conflict between Zionism and the Palestinians, and more generally a key link in producing an overall Israeli-Arab settlement, it has indeed failed them. Thus, while Oslo's proponents generally consider a two-state solution the most desirable, if not the only viable formula for a permanent settlement, they are faced with the uncomfortable reality that the only partitionist solution on offer is one in which the pre-1967 boundaries have become wholly irrelevant. Rather, the West Bank and Gaza Strip (excluding Jerusalem and its environs) have themselves already been effectively partitioned, into an emaciated and fragmented Palestinian entity, and a Jewish province known to its inhabitants as Judea-Samaria-Azza (or YESHA by its Hebrew acronym), which has been wholly absorbed by the Israeli state. The Palestinian entity, a state in name only, and an ethnic reservation in all but name, will furthermore exist within, rather than alongside, its menacing neighbour. Needless to say, this reality has put existing Arab-Israeli peace treaties under considerable strain rather than paved the way for additional agreements.

It is of course true that the dispossession of the Palestinian people long preceded Oslo, but the bantustanisation of the question of Palestine is its direct and intended outcome. In this regard, few arguments are as disingenuous as those which place the blame for the current crisis solely or primarily on Netanyahu's shoulders (as if it began only after his election), and which knowingly claim that Peres would in effect have entirely reversed the course he and Rabin chose from 1993 onwards, had the Labour Party been re-elected.

It is indeed true that Israeli negotiators during the Rabin-Peres years made numerous intimations to their eager Palestinian interlocutors at Oslo and during subsequent sessions, which collectively could be interpreted as a commitment to implement United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 in a manner not entirely inconsistent with the international community's interpretation of this resolution. More importantly, however, such confidences were never formalised, and any resulting documents never ratified, whilst the formal agreements which did result from such negotiations, each superseding its predecessor, progressively constricted the possibilities for meaningful decolonisation.

The metamorphosis of Oslo's withdrawal clause into a three-staged redeployment, the scope of which was subsequently left to Israel's sole discretion by the United States, is but a case in point. And no sooner did the ink on such agreements dry than their implementation, determined primarily by the gross imbalance of power between Israel and the Palestinians and removed from any form of international arbitration, ensured that, in the absence of an Israeli civil war or full-scale Arab-Israeli hostilities, Resolution 242 (to say nothing of UN resolutions which actually mention the Palestinian people) will remain ink on paper — nothing more.

While Oslo has set back the cause of Palestinian self-determination by at least a generation and has failed to develop into a process leading to a viable Israeli-Palestinian permanent settlement, and is therefore in a seemingly permanent state of crisis, it would be mistaken to conclude that its demise is imminent. The revolutionary transformation in Israeli-Palestinian relations initialed in the Norwegian capital was, ultimately, the product of more significant changes in the regional and international balance of power, symbolised by the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the establishment of American global hegemony, the Gulf crisis, and the bankruptcy of the PLO. As such, the Israeli-Palestinian arrangements established in 1993 will more likely than not survive in their fundamental respects so long as the current regional and international orders prevail.

With the Palestinians incapable of challenging the status quo, Israel refusing to offer a permanent settlement acceptable to any Palestinian leadership intent on surviving legitimately, and the United States having made a strategic choice to substitute the illusions of process for the requirements of peace, the current impasse can continue for quite some time. More to the point, what is today an impasse is likely to become a permanent arrangement of sorts, or rather a pattern of relations sustained by and ultimately dependent upon the regional and international balance of forces which produced it.

In this scenario, both further violence initiated by various detractors of the functional partition of the Occupied Territories, and further normalisation among its beneficiaries, are to be expected. A piecemeal expansion of the territory under Palestinian Authority rule, a unilateral and this time successful declaration of Palestinian statehood within these enclaves (perhaps in due course giving way to Jordanian supremacy in at least the West Bank arabistans), and Israeli annexation of most of the Occupied Territories are developments which can all be easily contained within the current framework, even if accompanied by periodic organised bloodletting. While the possibility of full-scale hostilities leading to mass expulsions along the lines of 1948 and 1967 cannot be dismissed, of course, barring extreme developments, an Israeli politician proposing the reconquest of Jabalia and the Nablus Qasaba is more likely to be sent to a psychiatric ward than elected prime minister.

Ultimately, the balance of power which has resulted in the formalisation of Palestinian dispossession must and will change. Indeed, there are subtle indications that it is already doing so, and the latest crisis in Iraq suggests that the question of Palestine continues to play a central role in regional politics and retains a capacity to serve as a unifying factor for the Arab world. Stronger yet, it appears to be one among many catalysts for the re-ordering of regional (and perhaps eventually international) alliances.

To simply conclude, however, that several million Israelis can never succeed in permanently lording it over several hundred million Arabs, and that in view of the current desultory situation any strategic change is by definition welcome, would be disastrous. If the conflict were merely one of numbers, Israel would never have been established, and bad situations furthermore have a habit of getting worse. Rather, Palestinians must seek to actively influence the impending changes to their advantage, and in doing so themselves propose (and no less importantly, pursue) agendas which do not compromise their inalienable rights. To continue to do otherwise is to remain on the margins of others' designs.

First and foremost, the Palestinian people must re-establish a national framework, on sound democratic and pluralistic foundations, which can accommodate, or rather reunite, its increasingly disparate and apathetic elements. Unless and until this cardinal challenge is effectively addressed, the remobilisation of the Palestinians is a non-starter and internal strife a constant threat, rendering other efforts futile and doomed to failure.

Second, the strategic choices and partnerships made during the past decade need to be critically reassessed and appropriate conclusions drawn. The propositions that Palestine will be liberated by Saddam Hussein, Uri Savir, or Dennis Ross have all been tried and have all failed miserably. Rather, it was as the common cause of the Arab world, as the international symbol of the struggle against dispossession and occupation and for the right to exist, and as the result of an interconnecting web of alliances the world over that the claim for Palestinian self-determination became internationally accepted and Israel a pariah state. While unprecedented access to the corridors of power in Washington and London may be a welcome addition, as a substitute it amounts to very little. Furthermore, one need only look at the Zionist experience to conclude that the neglect of basic alliances founded upon shared interests reduces rather than enhances the effectiveness of such access.

Finally, Palestinians need to think imaginatively about the future. Statehood, which during the past decade has effectively displaced self-determination in official Palestinian parlance, is probably imminent but in its present form certain to be meaningless as an adequate response to the question of Palestine. Partition, in fairness to the proponents of statehood (considered one and the same), had much to recommend it between 1974 and 1994, but as a result of Oslo is no longer a viable option. The reason for this is the incontrovertible transformation of Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories into a Mediterranean South Africa. A struggle against apartheid (literally "separateness", and already the official agenda of those parties represented in the previous Israeli government) requires different strategies, and different resolutions, than a struggle against military occupation. It is time that these begin to be seriously considered.

The writer is a Ramallah-based Palestinian political scientist, with numerous writings on Palestinian and other Arab-Israeli issues.

Reflections By Hani Shukrallah

What we paid for

I have very little knowledge of the intricacies of law, and more specifically, where the law draws the line between the free expression of opinion, criticism and debate, on the one hand, and slander or libel, on the other. Nevertheless, I find it very difficult to imagine a country achieving any kind of progress in its political life, sciences, arts or literature, if that country's citizens do not enjoy a "sacred" right to describe each other, and each other's ideas, as foolish, ignorant or any similar epithet, whether fairly or unfairly. Yet two Cairo courts, one of them a Court of Appeal, have found the use of such designations sufficient reason to consign Gamal Fahmi, a journalist, to prison for six months.

Thus in the space of less than a month we have three journalists in prison, serving sentences ranging from six to 12 months, for libel offences. In statements to *Al-Ahram Weekly*, published in this issue, Press Syndicate Chairman Makram Mohamed Ahmed remarked with bitter sarcasm that he hoped the prison ward accorded to journalists "is large enough", since there are some 60 cases currently before the courts in which journalists are charged in connection with libel offences.

The total absurdity of libel laws in Egypt stands exposed. And so do the limits of our own democratic resolve and convictions. Just two years ago journalists were basking in the glory of their "heroic" battle for press freedom. For a full year they fought against the "infamous" Law 93, and won. Or did they?

Libel offences still carry prison sentences. Libel law is so loosely worded that a journalist, such as Gamal Fahmi, could serve a prison term for what, in essence, is a value judgment. More glaring is the fact that libel laws in Egypt, both in text and in practice, are strongly biased in favour of the rich and powerful. Libel offences against public figures carry heavier penalties than against private citizens — a complete reversal of logic and legal practice in democratic countries.

In practice, libel is committed, unpunished and even unnoticed, on a daily basis against hundreds of private citizens, as a cursory glance at the crime, and often front, pages of the bulk of the national and party press would reveal. In Egypt, as elsewhere, the law holds a person accused of committing a crime innocent until proven guilty in a court of law. In most of the Egyptian press, however, the statement of an investigating officer, let alone the Interior Ministry, is sufficient proof to condemn scores of citizens, even before they are formally charged — unless, of course, they happen to be sufficiently powerful public figures, whether that power is derived from wealth, position, connections or any combination thereof.

How many alleged criminals, ranging from Islamist terrorists to Devil worshippers, are condemned on the pages of the Egyptian press before they are formally charged, tried or convicted? Choose any single year, and count. I suspect the numbers will run to the thousands.

The imprisonment of three journalists for libel offences exposes the limits of the journalists' "victory" in defending democratic liberties and press freedom two years ago. And so does the host of measures recently adopted in the clamp-down on "yellow journalism". But both expose the limits of the journalists' own commitment to democratic principles. We pay for what we get.

To The Editor

Saluting El-Gohari

Sir- Every Egyptian must be very proud and joyful after the overwhelming victory recently attained by our national football team in Côte d'Ivoire. The African Nations Cup won't be our last great achievement, whether in the field of sport or elsewhere. Egyptians have always proved capable of conquering the impossible.

However, there is something which should not pass unnoticed in this regard. Just before the African Championship, our national team was defeated several times. Our mass media, particularly the press, waged a severe campaign against the team and Mahmoud El-Gohari, its coach, in particular. The man was accused of being disloyal, negligent, and unreliable and many asked him to step down. Is this constructive and objective criticism? What if the national team lost the next match?

Despite the unfair criticism, El-Gohari seems to be the sort of man who can lay solid foundations with the bricks others throw at him. And such men are certain to succeed. Indeed, a person whose only business in life is to belittle others is only trying to cut them down to his size. Anyway, you can't stop others from criticising you but you can make them appear silly for doing it. That is exactly what El-Gohari did.

Essam Hanna Wahba
Assiut

Al-Ahram Weekly

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Romping round the Don



David Blake joins the body surge which frightened him away

photo: Sherif Sonbol

The Bolshoi Ballet of Russia. Don Quixote. Conductor Algis Jiouraitis. Main Hall, Cairo Opera House. 19 March.

This Don did not flow quietly, it ran along rowdy, happy and noisy, and in Spain it was not. We never went to Spain, we stayed in Russia. It was the Don that had gone away. Visually, as so often with Russian decor, we were in Hollywood's land of Oz, with Judy Garland about to appear over the rainbow. She didn't — a pity, she would have livened things up a bit.

The dance is supposedly the most direct way for the human creature to attain liberation. And perhaps the Russian invasion of Barcelona inspired Quixote to dance away over the hills, leaving his alter ego behind. He, fortunately, turned out to be a splendid, heftily proportioned lay figure.

And so the dancers of the Bolshoi took over, washing away the Don in a flood of movement which relegated the poor creature to that of a flood victim for the rest of the evening.

But what a flood, what power. The entire show of Don Quixote is a sleight of hand, almost a Broadway musical. "You're the best — we throw you on, light you up, speed the whole thing to prestissimo and the rest is dance." It's like old Italian opera, stand and deliver, give 'em voice.

The Bolshoi is give 'em body. This never fails because Russians are Russians. No other people have such naive trust in the absolute honesty of this down-to-bedrock approach. Soul — you get soul. Virtuosity — you get it straight with no frills. Their piano playing is like their dancing, the whole works. It is desperately hard labour to be a Russian artist of the theatre. That is why when they started to fly free they overwhelmed what is left of the West and its flight into hyperbolic technology. Russians are for real.

There was no need to open the programme of this Don except to make sure you could identify the particular dancers in the flood as they shot past like comets.

They bring purity of purpose to an exalted level, difficult for any mere mortals to achieve. The Bolshoi goes through the strange remnants of the Don Quixote story, never allowing a sidelong glance at plot or production. Things are supposed to occur in the story, there are mimed shreds of plot going on in the back row. In Act I the entire troupe, mostly blond, mostly very tall, and about as Latin as people in a Finnish marketplace, gave a spectacular showing of the entire classical movements of ballet.

When you have finished raving about the women, you can start on the men. Men are men and women are women here. This is both affecting and comfortable on stage. This long ballet is homely, there are plenty of children around, excited and deep in the stream — the Don has been swept downstream and out of sight.

The ballet version of Don Quixote is less expressive than the operatic one in French to music by Jules Massenet, written for the supreme Russian bass Feodor Chaliapin. Due to its success, the ballet was recreated but is less adaptable to the theatre than the sung version.

Marius Petipa arranged it from the Cervantes novel and it was given first at the Bolshoi in 1869. The music by Minkus is a cross which the ballet must bear. The Minkus score is danceable but makes for a very dusty listen. After ram tam tam and a bash from the bass you must make do with the dancers. And the dancers sent the creaking old score, story and production into realms of art and passion. Tchaikovsky did wonders for dancers. Minkus tries to drown them, but not the Bolshoi. The whole company stayed afloat except Don Quixote.

Heroin Kitri wants the hero, the local barber, Basil, from a Barcelona suburb. But all the other available males, knights and fairies, converge upon Kitri. She keeps her balance, both as dancer, in endless turns and twists, and as the future bride of the barber.

There are mock suicides, duels, and all the empty rhetoric of romantic ballet. All these situations are bleak and repetitive, so it rests with the Bolshoi to cope with them. This is achieved by turning the entire production into non-stop divertissement. One group comes, black and scarlet gypsies, then goes. Another, blue gypsies; matadors flash about and the clothes go Spanish, sometimes beautiful, sometimes mediocre.

After Kitri and Basil have had enough of knights and monsters they take flight and disappear. The Don, prostrate, moves into Act II. By this time, no one notices the story because the dancing, quite abstract classical, has become more and more brilliant. Cohorts of more gypsies and then Dulcinea, a fairy impostor of Kitri, provokes the charging of windmills. Everything becomes irrational and the curtain descends on Act II, which is finished, and the audience, naturally, unable to make any sense of the story, stands up and begins leaving — for good.

On reaching the exit doors of the Opera House, they were met by the entire staff who refused to let them out. "One more act to go," they shouted. Consternation, and back to the knights and fairies. The toffs returned to their seats, and Don Quixote, rather shaken, moved in to Act III.

Unless you are a balletomane, Don Quixote is sure to send you straight to dance theatre. But the Bolshoi probably knows just how much an audience can take of the arrangement, and so we moved straight into the marriage rites of Kitri and Basil.

This part of the ballet means business. As the dancers move excitedly around into positions of attack and defence and the high classicism becomes as formal as an army manoeuvre, the excitement fizzes.

Due to cancellations and date changes, correct assessment of the stars may be variable, but it seems, as the stage opens out for ultimate action, that we are watching Semizorova as Kitri and Ouvarov as her boyfriend Basil. These two dancers are quite destructively handsome. Cool, august and steely, equal to the highest tests and dangers of the fortissimo classic ballet pas de deux. This is the moment of their splendour, and they deliver it to the audience which is, rightly, stunned. One does not see much of this in a lifetime.

Semizorova is almost too tall for a *ballerina assolata* but not quite — her height sharpens and dazzles all she touches and her grandes jetés and turns are electric because of her physique. Ouvarov matches her completely; he is tall, a black knight, totally alluring, with strength to match and musicality. All one can do is feel the raptures they project, their accomplishments, which stand for tradition and devotion. When such offerings are made, it is futile to discuss decor and production. The great classicals are their own complete justification and their splendour outlasts even the theatres in which they dance.

A few years ago, the production of Don Quixote, done by the Cairo Opera Ballet Company, offered a different, warmer version. Without the endless resources of the Bolshoi, they nevertheless took the narrative to the brink — are the wild, wonderful dreams of the vulnerable aged able to withstand the battery they receive from the young or are they both part of the same mirage? Questions, not answers. After this Bolshoi performance, as the crowd filtered out into the heavy dust of the khamasin, a tall, handsome woman, in a sable coloured vicuna coat screamed — a man astride a large black stallion flourishing a sword was charging nearby, up the hill, to the exit of the triumphal arch of the opera: Don Quixote, escaping for the night into the fog of Cairo, sane at last.

Cinema

Two, though not for tea

Nadia El-Guindi's latest film may well give the audience a sense of déjà vu, writes **Khairiya El-Bishlawi**

Few Egyptian films have tackled the Arab-Israeli conflict in a direct way, and fewer still have attempted an objective analysis. This said, it remains unsurprising that producer and actress Nadia El-Guindi, who represents Egyptian cinema at its most crudely commercial, should do not one but two films based on the conflict — *Muhima Fi Tall Abib* (Mission in Tel Aviv; 1992) and *48 Saa Fi Israil* (48 Hours in Israel; 1998). Both films focus on espionage and glorify Egyptian state intelligence and its victories over the Mossad. Despite having different authors — screenplay writer Bashir El-Deek in the first and Bassiouni Othman in the second — the two films overlap in virtually every aspect.

In the first film, the heroine (Nadia El-Guindi) is embittered against the regime which dismissed her diplomat father after the revolution and which caused her pilot husband's death. When she leaves her child and travels to Paris, she is recruited by a Mossad agent (Said Abdel-Ghani). In the second film, the heroine (also Nadia El-Guindi) is also embittered by her husband's and her parents' death in the 1956 Suez War. In both cases, then, this is a widow who avenges her grievances against her country by offering sexual favours in return for vital information to be given to the enemy.

In both films, the woman undergoes a transformation from spy-vamp to reborn nationalist intent on atoning for past sins.

Both films wind up with the Nadia El-Guindi character performing heroic acts on behalf of the homeland. In "Mission in Tel Aviv" the heroine's motive is to make her son as proud of her as he is of his father; in "48 Hours in Israel" she has the additional motive of wanting to rescue her brother from the Israelis and thus consents to go to Israel. Nadia El-Guindi succeeds not only in her nationalist missions on the Egyptian front, but also in convincing a forgiving audience that she is a beautiful young woman, with lithe limbs.

The two films are directed in such a way as to allow Nadia El-Guindi to appear in full make-up and dressed up to the nines regardless of the situation. She moves through her role as if she is a poster advertisement for a make-up brand and star designer boutique. In both films El-Guindi has made sure to put in an appearance in her underwear and ensured a fully made-up dip in a foam bath — all regardless of how appropriate the situation. She seems also to have had her writers weave in song and dance scenes, again regardless of her talents.

There is little rhyme or reason to the film beyond it being the vehicle for an aging sex symbol. And what makes the Nadia El-Guindi character such a successful spy is her skill in things sexual. This pre-requisite on the part of Nadia El-Guindi, in turn, corrodes the differences between one screenplay writer and the other. In the dance scenes, therefore, and regardless of the screenplay writer, the confrontation between contending forces is put on hold until the enticing dance ends.

The commercial success of these films, it is to be added, depends greatly on the director's ability to control tone and the tempo demanded by the cardinal themes of seduction and open exchanges of bullets in streets. As for the writers, it is interesting to note the use to which they put Arabic and Hebrew, as well as religious symbols. In the first film, a man of the cloth in an old church in Jerusalem helps the heroine, while in the second the heroine seeks the help of Greek monks to hide an Egyptian intelligence agent, with the result that the Greek monks end up shooting Mossad agents.

Spirit of place is successfully invoked in both films. In the first, Fayrouz' song *Al-Quds Al-Atiqa* (Ancient Jerusalem) appears in various renditions. In the second film, the lyric *Ya Aghla Ism Fil-Wugoud Ya Masr* (O, Most Precious Name in Existence, Egypt), serves to heighten the heroine's nationalism and provides her with strength to face her torturers. In any case, the frequent shifts in setting, and the fact that the camera goes places, helps keep untravelled viewers in their seats throughout these two duplicated Nadia El-Guindi film exploits.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Rehab El-Sadek (Installations)
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 578 4494. Daily exc Fri, 11am-9pm. Until 26 March.
Works under the title Pages From Old Times.

Bernard Guillot (Photographs)
Sony Gallery, American University in Cairo, Main Campus, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5424. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 26 March.

Said El-Sadr
Extra Gallery, 3 Al-Nessim St, corner of Montaza St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 26 March.

Martin McInally (Paintings)
British Council Gallery, 192 Al-Nil St, Agouza. Tel 301 8319. Daily 9am-9pm. Until 27 March.

Emid Welsley Moharreb (Paintings)
Cairo Atelier, 2 Karim Al-Dawla St, Seliman Basha Sq, Downtown. Tel 574 6730. Daily 10am-1pm & 5pm-10pm. Until 27 March.

Hussein El-Ezabi (Paintings)
Al-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily 9am-9pm. Until the end of the month.

Gerhard Altenbourg (Drawings, wood cuttings, watercolours and lithographs)
Gallery of the Faculty of Fine Arts, 8 Ismail Mohamed St, Zamalek. Daily 10am-2pm & 4pm-7pm. Until 30 March.

Nazeeh Rasheed (Wood Carvings and Watercolours)
Indian Cultural Centre, 23 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3396. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 11am-7pm. Until 31 March.

Rabab Nimr
Khan Al-Maghrabi Gallery, 18 Al-Mansour Mohamed St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-9pm. Until 3 April.
Works under the title Black: White.

Collective Exhibition
Salama Gallery, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily exc Fri, 10am-2.30pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 5 April.
Works by Abu Bakr El-Nawawy, Galal El-Hesseiny and Fatma Refaat under the title Spring.

Hazem El-Mestikawy (Sculpture)
Espace Gallery, 1 Al-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily exc Thur, 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 8 April.

Fabrizio Clerici
Akhnaton Gallery, Centre of Art, 1 Al-Maahad Al-Swissri St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8211. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1.30pm & 5.30pm-9.30pm. Until 14 April.
Oils, watercolours, mixed media and lithographs by a surrealist in the tradition of de Chirico.

Collective Exhibition (Calligraphy)
Ewart Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. Opening 1 April, 5pm. Daily exc Fri, 9am-9pm. Until 16 April.

Wahib Nassar (Paintings)
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 578 4494. Opening 29 March, 7pm. Daily exc Fri, 11am-8pm. Until 23 April.

Ahmed Badawy (Jewelery) & Ahmed Ragab Sakr (Paintings)
Extra Gallery, Al-Nessim St, corner of Montaza St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Opening 30 March, 7pm. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 23 April.

Ahmed Badawy

Maja Fredriesson (Installations)
Cairo-Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef Al-Guindi St, Bab Al-Louq. Tel 393 1764. Daily exc Sun, 12 noon-3pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 24 April.

Jewelery Designs by Artists
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 Al-Sheikh Al-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. Opening 1 April, 7pm. Until 25 April.
Silver and gold jewelery encrusted with precious and semi-precious stones designed by Italian painters and sculptors.

Jack Kilby (Photographs)
Sony Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5424. Opening 30 March, 7pm. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 7 May.
Works under the title Arab Jerusalem in the Shadows of the Noble Sanctuary.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 342 0601. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956).

FILMS

18 Anni Tra Una Settimana.
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 Al-Sheikh Al-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. 28 March, 7pm.

Le Dossier 51
French Cultural Institute, 1 Madraset Al-Hoqouq Al-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. 29 March, 7pm.

Notice:
Some commercial cinemas now change their programmes every Wednesday, others every Monday. The information provided is valid at the time of going to press. It is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For more information, contact the venue.

Titanic
Drive In, entrance of Al-Shorouq City, Cairo-Ismailia desert road. Tel 012-219 0831. Daily 6pm, 9.30pm & midnight. Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche Al-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 3.30pm & 6.30pm. Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

The Relic
Normandy, 31 Al-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Air Force 1
Renaissance, World Trade Centre, Corniche Al-Nil, Maspero. Tel 580 4039. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Odeon I, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

Addicted to Love
Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche Al-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Mr Bean
Al-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Cairo Sheraton, Al-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight.

Two Much
Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Fire Down Below
El-Haram, Al-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Face/Off
Odeon III, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

Tomorrow Never Dies
Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Resala Ila Al-Wali (Message to the Wali)
Odeon II, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm. Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm.

Tamania wa Arba'in Saa Fi [illegible] (48 Hours in Israel)
Diana, 17 Al-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 592 4727. Daily, 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Hysteria
Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 593 4284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Ismailia Rayeh Gaey (Ismailia Back and Forth)
Rivoli II, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 8pm & 10pm. Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

DANCE

The Sleeping Beauty
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 339 8144. Daily 8pm, until 29 March.
The Bolshoi Theatre of Russia performs.

Sitalpur Ganesh Chhau Dance Group
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya St, Abdin. Tel 391 9956. 31 March, 7.30pm.

Nora The Gypsy
Al-Hanagar, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. 31 March-12 April, 8pm.
A dance theatre performance by Diana Caloni.

MUSIC

National Arabic Music Ensemble
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya St, Abdin. Tel 391 9956. 26 March, 9pm.
Conducted by Salah Ghobashi.

Cairo Symphony Orchestra
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 339 8144. 26 March, 8pm.
Compositions by Handel, Respighi and Vivaldi, with violin soloist and conductor Katrin Scholz.

Cairo Opera Orchestra
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 27 March, 2pm.
Performing Vivaldi's Four Seasons.

Yehia Khalil
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 27 & 28 March, 8pm.

Conservatoire Children's Orchestra and Choir
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 29 March, 11am.

Egyptian Musical Youth
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 30 March, 8pm.

Violin and Piano Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 31 March, 8pm.
Shamel Rashedov performs.

National Arabic Music Ensemble
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 31 March, 8pm.

THEATRE

Arabic One Act Plays
Wallace Theatre, Greek Campus, AUC, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 5436. Until 31 March, 7pm.
Fout Aleina Bokra (Pass By Us Tomorrow) and *Elli Ba'doh* (Next in Line), scripted by Mohamed Salmawy and directed by Injy Solh.

Al-Tayeb Wal-Sherrir (The Good and The Bad)
Al-Salam Theatre, Qasr Al-Aini St. Tel 355 2484. Daily, 10pm.
Yehia El-Fakharani, Sawsan Badr, Mohamed Metwalli and Sayed Azmi perform under the direction of Ahmed Abdel-Halim, in a play scripted by Alfred Farag with songs written by Gamal Bekhit.

Alabanda
Al-Fardous Theatre, Al-Beouth Sq. Tel 482 3017. Daily 8.30pm; Thur 9.30pm.
With bellydancer Dina, Mona Abdel-Ghani, Sherif Mounir, Mohamed Heneidi, Alaa Wuleieddin, Magda Zaki, Magda Zaki, Ahmed El-Saqqa, Ahmed Aql and Hani Ramzi.

LECTURES

The Age of Trust
Blue Room, Greek Campus, AUC, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 5436. 26 March, 6.15pm.
Lecture by Distinguished Visiting Professor Gabriel Josipovici, professor of English at the School of European Studies and author of 12 novels and over a dozen plays, among other numerous works.

Standards of Life of the Medieval Student
Netherlands Institute for Archaeology and Arabic Studies, 1 Dr Mahmoud Azmi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 0076. 26 March, 5.30pm.
Lecture by Corinne Morisot, IFAO.

The Second Arab Cultural Integration Conference
VIP Lounge, 6th floor, Hill House & Oriental Hall, Main Campus; 28 March, Blue Room, Greek Campus, AUC, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 5436. 25-28 March, 9am-6pm.

Reconsiderations in the Economic History of the Middle East
Oriental Hall, Main Campus, AUC, as above. Tel 357 5062. 28 March.
11am-3.30pm: "Grand Theories: The Decline and Fall of the Pirenne Thesis" (in English) by Dr Stuart Sears, assistant professor, Department of Arabic Studies, AUC; "Merchants and Modes of Enrichments in the Regency of Tunisia, 17th to early 19th centuries" (in Arabic) by guest speaker, Professor Sadok Boubaker, Department of History, Tunis University; "The Averino: A Greek Entrepreneurial Family in Modern Egypt" (in English) by Ahmed Abdel-Latif, graduate student, Department of Political Science, AUC; "Egypt's Trade Agents Abroad During the Reign of Mohamed Ali" (in Arabic) by Hamdi Hamdi Saqr, Doctoral candidate, Mansoura University.
3.30pm-6pm: Economics of Labour "Egypt's Unemployment Crisis of the 1930s" (in Arabic) by Iman Farag, CEDEJ; "The Fall of the Guilds in Egypt, 1876-1892" (in English) by John Chalcraft, Doctoral candidate, NY University; "Feminisation of Villages — Social and Economic Effects of Male Out-Migration: the Example of Two Syrian Villages" (in English) by Elizabeth Horsting, graduate student, Department of Arabic Studies, AUC.

The Role of Private Universities in Higher Education in Egypt
JC Auditorium, Greek Campus, AUC, as above. 28 March, 6pm.
Lecture by Minister of Higher Education Moufid Shehab.

Globalisation: Blessing or Curse?
Oriental Hall, Main Campus, AUC, as above. 29-30 March, 9am-8pm.
The fifth research conference on the subject.

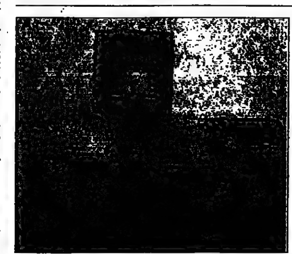
Les Antibiotiques et Leurs Essais
French Cultural Institute, 1 Madraset Al-Hoqouq Al-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. 31 April, 6.30pm.
Lecture by Professor Joseph Hajjar.

A History with a Future?
Cinema Hall, Embassy of the Czech Republic, 4 Dokki St, Giza. 31 March, 7pm.
Lecture by Zuzana Skalova, art historian and restorer specialising in icons.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by
Injy El-Kashef

Around the galleries



Mohamed El-Alawi

GALLERY Two at the Arts Centre in Zamalek is given over to an exhibition of sculptures by Mohamed El-Alawi under the collective title "Formations Below Zero". These reveal a flirtation with primitivism evidenced in the plant and bird symbols, as well as in terra cotta textures of his works.

Exhibition space at Al-Hanager is occupied by the first exhibition of oil paintings by Fawzia Hawwas, under the title "Egypt Beautifies Itself". Streets have been emptied of pedestrians, pollution is unheard of and nature reigns triumphant in these nostalgic visual vignettes of urban life which show a degree of technical accomplishment.

Reviewed by **Nagwa El-Ashri**

When in Rome

Communicative pitfalls: Mona Anis felt that something was not quite right



Neither religion nor politics: Harbermas confronts his audience

It has to be said at the outset that Egyptians must be grateful to the American University in Cairo for inviting Habermas to lecture in Egypt. Surely it is not the fault of the AUC that there seems to be no national academy at present interested in engaging leading world intellectuals and thinkers in a cross-cultural dialogue. Hence, if one laments the fact that Habermas came to Cairo and left without being exposed to the constituency that would have most benefited from that encounter, this is not the fault of the AUC.

Having said that, I must admit that the overriding thought I had while listening to the two lectures he gave at the AUC was that there had been a more propitious opportunity for both Habermas and those in this country who are interested in his work, and in social theory in general, to engage in more competent communicative action.

Habermas himself seemed slightly ill-at-ease with his listeners, especially during his first lecture. Perhaps he felt that the possibilities for misunderstanding were so great, given his perception of the background conditions, that he had to be careful in ways that would be unnecessary had he been lecturing in Germany, or elsewhere in the West.

His first lecture was entitled: "Learning through disaster: reflections on the short 20th century." Certainly there was something odd about the fact that, given the disaster in question was the ascendancy of Hitler and its resultant catastrophes, the two terms Habermas seemed to be deliberately avoiding were "the Jews" and "the holocaust".

This in itself constituted a major problem, an impossible situation, for he was an intellectual trying to say what he has always said, and what he is known always to have believed, but not quite saying it, either out of politeness or out of a desire to avoid possible confrontation.

A great amount of care was invested in the invention of an alternative vocabulary: "ethnic minority" was made to stand in for the word "Jews"; "the newly formed state of Israel" for the supposed "independence of Israel", and so on. Perhaps Habermas felt that whilst in Germany, or indeed in Israel, it would be obvious to single out the holocaust as the most catastrophic event of the 20th century; to do so in the Arab world, where the price of atoning for the holocaust has been the dispossession of millions of Palestinian Arabs, might be a bit risky.

If that realisation was the reason behind the awkward atmosphere that pervaded throughout Habermas' first lecture then perhaps this is not too bad. One suspects, though, that the problem was much deeper than that. Indeed, Habermas opened his lecture by acknowledging a degree of Euro-centrism in what he was going to say, and the whole lecture was interspersed with occasional niceties about how intimidating it was to speak in the shadow of the Pyramids and about the longevity of Eastern civilizations and the rich spiritual dimensions of these civilizations.

But did he feel that he confronted an audience that solved problems by means other than a common appeal to the shared tenets of reason which his theory of communicative rationality advocates, an audience inclined to resort to extra-rational authorities, such as religious ones, for example? Habermas' theory, a characteristically liberal one, states, after all, that modernity and rationality are interlinked at every level. If you are confronted with an audience that, supposedly, resolves arguments by not so rational means, what are you supposed to say? The background conditions are simply not in place.

The second lecture went down far better than the first. It took place in a smaller hall and Habermas himself seemed far more relaxed, and was thus able to charm his audience with various turns of phrase and witticisms. Also, the title of the lecture was less problematic: "Theory and Praxis Revisited". *Theory and Practice* being the title of a well-known book of his which appeared in English in 1973, so everybody was on more or less familiar ground.

The theory and praxis question, or how theory can be transformed into reality, has been the subject of debate since Plato and Aristotle, and Habermas delivered a brilliant lecture mapping the itinerary of the debate from that time to the present day. But again, whenever he had anything negative to say concerning religion or even metaphysical thought, he felt obliged to explain that "religion proper" differed from its various realisations, and even qualified some of his statements by saying "perhaps one should say quasi-religious formulations." It was as if, as the friend sitting next to me noted, he felt he was lecturing at the Vatican.

And it was this extra-caution not to offend, or more bluntly put, the presupposition, on Habermas' part, that we were evangelical priests, that deprived us all from having a more communicatively competent rapport. Once you believe you are in the Vatican it does not matter if you are wedded to scientific protocols and habits of thought, it does not matter if you think that the generalised and social acceptance of these is the key to historical development, for the doctrine of Papal infallibility will inevitably appear, and appear, necessarily, as archaic, pre-modern, superstitious, and thoroughly nonsensical. No matter how much respect you have for religion, this is not going to change. And while theoretically one can separate the two areas, the price of this is incoherence; one set of rules, but all sorts of areas where they do not apply... areas such as religion, 'Egypt' etc.

Etiquette books say that you must not discuss religion or politics at dinner parties. Was Habermas advised similarly; no religion or politics in Egypt, the natives are volatile? If this was the case, it was bad advice. For a philosopher, especially a political and social philosopher, it is difficult to avoid religion and politics, especially when religion is, or is becoming, an expression of politics. It is the no-go areas that tend to include most things of interest; and "communication" tends to get fatally distorted as a result of these evasions. So was it a 'social' visit after all?

Even if it were so, it is a shame that Habermas did not give, as it were, an 'autobiographical' lecture. Of course I do not mean autobiographical in the sense that he tell us personal anecdotes, but it would have been very interesting to hear from Habermas why he felt it important to try and clarify certain questions early on. What animated him? Why did he want to think as a career? It would have been very interesting to hear someone asking him, as indeed he was asked in other Western countries, if he could talk about his relation to German-ness, Germany and how he thought he stood in relation to the previous generations. Is he an heir, a rebel, an Oedipal son, an outcast?

Personally I would have liked to ask him simple questions such as: what was Adorno "really like"; or Lukacs; what did you think about Karl Popper? Did you ever meet Bertrand Russell?

And on a more pertinent level to this part of the world, I would have wanted to see people discussing with him the Germany-Zionism-Holocaust-Palestinian imbroglio. But then these were the no-go areas, and it would have been rude to try and impose on a senior philosopher, who is also very charming, questions that he had been trying so painfully to avoid.

I still believe, though, that engaging with Habermas in an intellectual debate, free of all restrictions, would have been a worthwhile endeavour, both for him and for us, had the whole business been a more relaxed one. After all Chomsky found his dialogue with the Islamists in Cairo one of the most stimulating events of his visit, but perhaps this is because Chomsky was willing to venture into avenues unthinkable for Habermas.

photos: Sherif Sonbol

Plain Talk

I was very happy to participate in the International Literature Conference organised by the British Council, together with Cairo and Ain Shams Universities. The topic was "The Arabs and Britain: Changes and Exchanges."

In attendance were a number of academics from the two organising universities, the Australian poet Anne Fairbairn and the young Lebanese-British writer Tony Hanania who, at the age of 24, produced his first novel, greeted with great acclaim in 1997 and which is now being made into a film. Tony has just finished his second novel *Unreal City*. Also attending was the Egyptian novelist Ahdaf Soueif.

Anne Fairbairn read a long poem, "Two Gardens in Cairo", which she dedicated to Naguib Mahfouz, while Hanania gave readings from his two novels.

Among the subjects covered by distinguished speakers were Richard Burton's *Pilgrimage to al-Medinah and Meccah*, Lady Duff Gordon's *Letters From Egypt*, Wilfred Thesinger's *Arabian Sands*, together with the work of contemporary writers such as Penelope Lively.

Discussions were lively, interesting and informative and I particularly appreciated the readings given by the poets and novelists. Arab-British relations always seem to be described in love-hate terms. A great many British writers have produced works about Arabia. Certainly the desert has, for centuries, exercised an intense fascination: one need think only of Byron's Childe Harold: "Oh! That the desert were my dwelling place/With one fair spirit for my minister,/That I might all forget the human race".

In the interesting volume *Heart Beguiled Araby*, Kathryn Tidrick addresses what she terms the English romance with Arabia. The title of her book is drawn from a Walter de la Mare poem: "Wails the wind from star to star;/Rock the loud waves their dirge; and see/Through foam and wreck a boat drifts back;/ Ah, heart beguiling Araby."

The foreword to Tidrick's book is by Albert Hourani. He explains the complexities of the way in which the English viewed the Arab world, the myths they constructed, foremost among them being that the nomads of the Arabian desert were a pure race, possessing qualities which they lose only "through demoralising contacts with the manners of others."

Independence, simplicity, nobility and honour were attributed to nomadic Arab peoples. And it was precisely because of these attributes, Hourani argues, that so many English writers were able to perceive a natural affinity between themselves and Arabs, and believe themselves capable of ruling Arabs easily, justly and without unduly disturbing Arab society.

This illusion of intimacy and understanding "was the product of inequality of power. It has been said that defeat is a more profound experience than victory: just so, those who lie under the power of another are always conscious of it, while those who possess power may be unaware of it. For them a relation of power can be magically transformed into one of love; rule appears to be dominance without tears."

Hourani believes that the appearance of harmony and affection can have a fragile reality until the power that lies at the base of it is challenged.

One may or may not agree with this. I, personally, have met many true and genuine people during my long stay in England. Strangely, I never encountered the patronising attitude so often attributed to the English. And certainly, there is little doubt in my mind that English literature has produced several superb books about the Arab world, both in the form of fiction and of memoirs. I was particularly pleased to see that one of my favourite writers on Egypt, P H Newby, was the subject of a paper titled "Liberal Humanism in P H Newby's Egyptian Trilogy."

Mursi Saad El-Din

The making of an icon

Hala Halim examines the curious tales that have surrounded Samira Moussa, nuclear physicist, and much more besides

Samira Moussa has been with us of late. She has been with us courtesy of the joint International Women's Day and Mothers' Day celebrations. To mark this double-bill occasion, the General Organisation for Cultural Palaces organised a one-day, all-purpose event (22 March) at Samira Moussa's native village, Sunbu in the Delta. The event included a seminar about the nuclear physicist, the laying of the foundation stone of a Samira Moussa Cultural Palace, the inauguration of an art exhibition by women from the region and a play performed by school pupils centred around the life of Moussa and other pioneering women. So, it's Samira Moussa as feminist icon.

It has been impending for a few decades, this "iconisation" of Samira Moussa, whether feminist or otherwise. On and off since her death in 1952, she has been floated in different discourses and contexts under a variety of guises, though none of these congealed into a definitive icon. And it has to be said that Samira Moussa's story, pared down to bare bone of indisputable facts, lends itself to all manner of cladding.

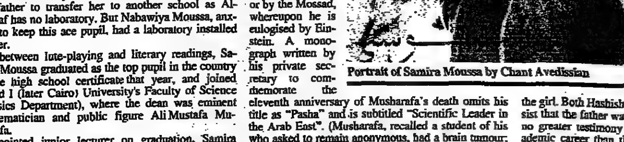
At primary school in Sunbu, Moussa (b 1917) was spotted as an outstanding pupil when her teacher discovered that she could recite verbatim an obituary of nationalist leader Saad Zaghloul she had read in a newspaper. Her father, a landowner, took the teacher's advice to place Samira in a Cairo school, and moved with the whole family to the capital. There, Samira was enrolled at the Al-Ashraf Girls' School founded by feminist and pedagogue Nabawiya Moussa. In secondary school, dissatisfied with the algebra textbook, she wrote up her own and distributed it among her classmates. Two years before graduation, she asked her father to transfer her to another school as Al-Ashraf has no laboratory. But Nabawiya Moussa, anxious to keep this ace pupil, had a laboratory installed for her.

In between lute-playing and literary readings, Samira Moussa graduated as the top pupil in the country in the high school certificate that year, and joined Fouad I (later Cairo) University's Faculty of Science (Physics Department), where the dean was eminent mathematician and public figure Ali Mustafa Musharafa.

Appointed junior lecturer on graduation, Samira Moussa wrote her master's thesis. Her PhD scholarship to the UK was postponed due to the Second World War and she finally travelled to England (Bedford College, University of London) in 1947 and completed a thesis on the properties of X-rays. On her return to Egypt she took up university teaching and also assigned herself visits to Qasr El-Aini Hospital to conduct experiments in radio treatment of cancer and became a founding member of "The Committee for Protection from Atomic Bombs". In 1952 she accepted an invitation to visit the US in the context of an international exchange programme of nuclear physicists, part of which was to take place in California. It was in mid-August 1952 in California that she had the fatal accident when the car she was in fell off a cliff.

Allegations of foul play mooted in newspapers at the time were not investigated — because, suggests her brother, the revolution was still in its infancy and not particularly keen on undertaking an investigation that could cause a diplomatic crisis with the US.

For a while, Samira Moussa would fade from official memory, emerging sporadically as a sub-plot in the rewritten story of her dean Mustafa Musharafa (d 1950). An undoubtedly multi-talented man and prolific researcher who studied philosophy before turning to science, Musharafa Pasha is recast in the late '50s and early '60s — via the tide of national pride and pan-Arabism — as a renaissance all-rounder, labelled "Arab" scientist, anti-monarchist, successful in the face of British colonial opposition and, ultimately, assassinated either by the throne or by the Mossad, whereupon he is eulogised by Einstein. A monograph written by his private secretary to commemorate the eleventh anniversary of Musharafa's death omits his title as "Pasha" and is subtitled "Scientific Leader in the Arab East". (Musharafa, recalled a student of his who asked to remain anonymous, had a brain tumour; the same articles that speak of British opposition to Musharafa make sure to underline his great academic and social success while a student in England.) But where is Samira Moussa in the rewritten Musharafa narrative?



Portrait of Samira Moussa by Chant Avedissian

When Samira Moussa graduated with honours from the Faculty of Science, it is said, there was opposition to her appointment as junior lecturer on grounds of gender; Musharafa threatened to resign if the appointment did not go through, according to this story, and she became the first female junior lecturer in the Faculty of Science. (The same staff member of the Faculty of Science who was one generation younger than Moussa recalls that there were women lecturers in various departments at the time.) Thus dove-tailed, Musharafa and Moussa emerge occasionally as potential national icons among scientists, particularly in articles written by Saleh Mursi, the late John Le Carré of Egypt.

The alleged assassinations of the two scientists, of course, fit in with a number of Mossad assassinations of Iraqi nuclear physicists, and an Egyptian scientist, El-Mashad, who worked on the Iraqi nuclear programme. In a sense, then, served as a statement that Egypt had been developing nuclear capabilities earlier. Then there was late President Sadat's decision in 1981 to confer on Samira Moussa the Merit Award of Sciences and Arts, a move, perhaps prompted by the need to inject a little lustre into the flagging national pride.

Then there was the TV rendition of the Samira Moussa story in the form of a serial where the nuclear physicist was played by Madiha Hamdi. Here, remembers her niece Hala Hashish, an accountant, Moussa's father was represented as an illiterate peasant, opposed to her academic ambitions and intent on marrying off the girl. Both Hashish and Moussa's brother Maher insist that the father was literate and that there could be no greater testimony to his support of Samira's academic career than the fact that he sold the plot of land he owned and moved with the entire family to Cairo. Indeed, Samira Moussa's father, rather than being the uprooted, grumbling pater familias, later acquired a hotel in downtown Cairo.

Hashish also takes issue with another media spin on her aunt's story: it has been claimed, she says, that Samira Moussa's interest in treatment of cancer patients was prompted by her own mother's death of cancer — for all the world as if scientific curiosity and research need to follow autobiographical cause and effect. "My grandmother outlived my aunt; and it was the shock of my aunt's death that hastened her own death," says Hashish.

A liberation of sorts of Samira Moussa has recently come in the form of a stencilled monoprint by Chant Avedissian exhibited at the British Council earlier this month on the occasion of International Women's Day. Part of an on-going project of depictions of Egyptian icons of the '50s and '60s (the decades of the artist's childhood and adolescence), Avedissian claims that this particular drawing was prompted exclusively by the fact that Samira Moussa "as the first Egyptian woman nuclear physicist" is little known, and deserves to be introduced to the general public, hence his having written her name on the drawing. Avedissian says he first read about Samira Moussa in a book entitled *Ashhar Hawadith* (Famous Accidents) where the nuclear physicist features among singer Asmahan and Marilyn Monroe. He says he alludes to the mystery of Samira Moussa's fatal car accident in the black wheels placed in the background of the drawing. But given the exaggeratedly '50s look of the drawing, this work can well be read as a commentary on the nature of "iconisation", whether in a self-reflexive impulse on the part of the artist or as a playful deconstruction of social realist depictions.

The integrity and outstanding quality of Samira Moussa's scientific achievements remain to be explored. Meanwhile, did Samira Moussa really become a feminist icon in last Sunday's celebration in her native village? Down the alley between two schools, a primary one and a secondary Samira Moussa School, there were little patches of uncoordinated festivity. There was a particularly cheery folkloric troupe warming up before the arrival of the governor. At the end of the alley there were two rows of boys dressed as scouts and holding sticks in a make-shift cordoned aisle leading to nothing in particular and beyond them was a fire-brigade van, there, one suspected, lest someone make an incendiary speech. There was a military band at the Samira Moussa School, after which the pupils gave a dramatisation of her life where a young girl in a lab coat, standing in front of a door marked Laboratory, declaimed: "We lay our life down for the homeland". In the school library xeroxed brochures prepared by the teachers of the Samira Moussa School for International Women's Day cited ten commandments given by an unnamed — and presumably generic — mother to her daughter on her wedding day, the last commandment being "total obedience to your husband".

Living in a shoe

Informal settlements are a plague for urban planners; but how do the inhabitants themselves feel? A case study provides researchers and officials with food for thought, as Fayza Hassan discovered

In more than one respect, the informal settlement of Al-Hutiya in Agouza is, on a small scale, a typical example of old informal settlements in Cairo. Last week, the Centre for Sociological and Criminological Studies organised a conference on informal settlements, attended by Minister of Social Affairs Mervat Tellawi and Giza Governor Maher El-Guindi. Al-Hutiya was presented and discussed as a detailed case study. The study was carried out by a task force under the supervision of Mahmoud El-Kurdi, director of urban studies at the centre.

Al-Hutiya covers two square kilometres which encroach on property belonging to the Ministry of Religious Endowments. It is a mixed residential/commercial settlement, explained El-Kurdi, including apartment buildings, shops and a number of mud huts as well as nine empty lots. Its population, rural in origin, earns less than LE200 a month on average and settled on this formerly agricultural land more than half a century ago. One third of the families are headed by women who, like the men, make their living in the vicinity.

This particular research project could serve as inspiration for more general studies of the 561 shanty towns across Egypt. Nadia Salem, professor of economics at Zaqaziq University pointed out the need for the creation of a central database for the many studies independently completed by different governmental and non-governmental organisations on the subject, in order to avoid duplication and the wasting of valuable resources and time. Maps and figures should be made readily available to provide the concerned authorities with a complete picture, she suggested.

Recognising that informal settlements are a global phenomenon, Suhair Lutfi, director of the centre, posed a number of questions which, she said, had to be seriously addressed before embarking on an overall plan to remove or upgrade the areas which have developed haphazardly over the years, due to the lack of affordable accommodation for citizens living below the poverty line. First, she emphasised, it is necessary to examine the interaction between this type of environment and its inhabitants. Are the inhabitants of informal settlements aware of their problems? Do they perceive them in the same way as social scientists do? Would the government be willing and able to intervene positively to improve living conditions, or should this kind of intervention be left to NGOs? And, finally, do informal settlements contribute to forming the social groups that inhabit them, or vice- versa?

El-Guindi commented that it was impossible to establish clear-cut policies, as each area has specific problems. Each case must be studied individually and decisions made according to the particular circumstances of every settlement. In the case of Al-Hutiya, upgrading seems to be the answer, he noted, in view of the fact that the major part of the infrastructure is in place, a number of buildings are not substandard, and most of the breadwinners work near their dwellings. Relocating them would serve no practical purpose and would not improve their economic condition.

According to Minister of Social Affairs Mervat Tellawi, 12 million Egyptian citizens live in some sort of informal settlement. If a decision is made to move the inhabitants of some or all of these areas, and to relocate them in new satellite cities, the vacated land should not be sold to developers in the large cities, but rather transformed into green areas. In Turkey, she explained, the army was once employed to build new cities and the dwellers of shanty towns moved there by force. "This is not the way we want to do it here," she emphasised.

Rather, incentives should be created and help must be extended if people are to find efforts to improve their quality of life worthwhile. This may be achieved either by improving their existing environment, or by moving to a different one. Before thinking of uprooting the population of entire settlements however, said Tellawi, there should be satellite cities ready to provide the necessary accommodation, jobs and services. Young people have been keen on settling in Sinai because they have found a better quality of life, "but no one is willing to move to the middle of nowhere just because there are cheap flats available," she exclaimed. The time it would take the dwellers of these new flats to reach their place of work and the high cost of transportation are very powerful deterrents. Many people have refused to take possession of new apartments when these are far from their place of work, or have abandoned them, preferring to settle in a shanty town within the city. Satellite cities have to be real cities, with all the amenities and opportunities that will induce people to settle and put down roots. They must offer clear advantages over old ways of living.

Participants recommended that the problem of informal settlements be addressed without delay and practical solutions found to improve the quality of life in shanty towns, which are widely perceived to represent the most common breeding grounds for criminals, drug traffickers and terrorists.

By the rod

Skirmishes among school students have been in the news recently, and efforts to combat corporal punishment have opened a wide-ranging debate on violence in schools — but also in society at large. Gihan Shahine follows the battle in progress



Apart from the occasional fistfight in the playground, violence is not the first word most people would associate with education. But a school, after all, is something of a social microcosm. Violence is a concern for society at large, and schools are not exempted. Early this month, students pitched Molotov cocktails into a neighbouring school; last year, the discovery that some teachers were resorting to corporal punishment, despite a clear ban from the Ministry of Education, was making headlines. "Aggression in schools only reflects increased violence and low moral standards in society as a whole," comments veteran educationalist Hamed Ammar.

While the students' battle gave rise to comments on issues from delinquency to unemployment, the corporal punishment debate, still raging, has brought the educational system as a whole into the limelight. Officials at the Ministry of Education admit that incidents of abuse have been reported, but assert that, despite a recent increase in the number of such incidents, it is not possible to speak of a "phenomenon".

One of the more potentially explosive issues currently being discussed is the glaring inequality between public and private schools. In public schools, teachers often have to deal with 100 students per class — and the disciplinary problems that this entails. In private schools, on the other hand, parents pay high fees — and expect their children to be treated accordingly. But this is not necessarily the case, according to Ghada Helmi, an English teacher and a concerned mother. "Students are punished physically, even in private schools," she says. After a teacher beat a student during a school assembly, Helmi and other parents received an announcement from the Ministry of Education asserting the complete prohibition of any form of corporal punishment. Hussein Kamel Bahaaeddin, the minister of education, has also denounced incidents of physical punishment reported in some schools and asserted that the ministry is sparing no effort in enforcing the ban.

Clearly, however, it is in public schools that conditions are more conducive to frustration, among both teachers and pupils. Ammar explains that teachers' low salaries and the difficulties they encounter in attempting to make ends meet make them more liable to vent their frustration on students, "either by forcing them to take private lessons or by resorting to physical punishment."

According to a law issued by the Ministry of Education, if a teacher is accused of beating a student, a committee must be formed to investigate the case. If proven guilty, the teacher must be punished. Punitive measures range from a one-month salary cut to the teacher's transfer to an administrative job, according to Mahmoud El-Qoussi, deputy minister of education for primary schooling. Ammar, however, maintains that, although legal measures can be effective in combating violence at schools, they are insufficient.

"We should focus more on the qualifications of the teachers themselves," he argues. "We simply cannot assign a supervisor to control every single teacher, and teachers themselves should understand that they must develop techniques other than physical punishment in imposing discipline."

Psychiatrist Youssri Abdel-Mohsen warns that corporal punishment and mental cruelty, beyond the immediate effects, may undermine the natural development of children's ability to learn. "Many children tend to hate school," says Abdel-Mohsen. "A friendly teacher-student relationship would help students learn better." Pedagogy aside, however, it is difficult, at best, for a teacher to establish a friendly relationship with a hundred rowdy students.

Many teachers, furthermore, believe that mild forms of physical punishment, like a slap on the hand with a ruler, are necessary to maintain discipline in class. "Children do not understand what is right or wrong otherwise," says Nashwa Salah, an English teacher at a private school. "They simply do not respond to shouting, threats, or other forms of punishment. I hit the students when necessary, and the result is terrific. The students and their parents love me and they know I am doing a good job."

Some teachers even complain that the prohibition of physical punishment in schools has belittled teachers in their students' eyes. "Students know that the teacher has no means of disciplining them, and they simply do not listen any more," Ghada Helmi complains.

Many educationalists believe that teachers who resort to physical punishment to discipline students are not qualified to work in education. "Most teachers do not have a deep understanding of child psychology," says Ammar. "They believe that the teacher is the only authority in class and s' uld be obeyed fully, and that any uisturbance of class order must be punished."

Ammar, in fact, attributes lack of discipline in class to the teachers' methods. "The teacher is usually the reason why the child gets bored, because most teachers adopt rote teaching techniques," he explains. "Instead of punishing a child for disturbing the class, the teacher should develop more interesting techniques to grab the students' attention."

Educationalist Amina Niyazi suggests that child psychology should be one of the most important subjects on the curriculum of any teaching institute. "Schools should also examine new applicants for teaching positions, and make sure that they are able to deal with children."

Metwalli Mansour, an educational expert and vice-chairman of the General Authority for the Eradication of Illiteracy, adds that the problem starts at the Faculty of Education, which accepts students who did poorly in the general secondary certificate. The college does not even run eligibility exams for prospective teachers, other than a pronunciation test that is not always administered.

"Many students enter the Teachers' College in order to guarantee that they will get a job in the future, not because they are interested in the field," Mansour says. "Many teachers are not even graduated from the Faculty of Education."

Mansour, however, sympathises with teachers confronted with blatant disrespect on the part of their pupils.

Five years ago, the Ministry of Education undertook a campaign to educate prospective teachers studying in Faculties of Education nationwide. "The ministry has so far qualified 40 per cent of the 450,000 teachers nationwide," El-Qoussi notes. "A number of teachers have also been sent to England, the US and France to become acquainted with the latest teaching techniques. Teachers' salaries have also been increased recently, and many incentives have been provided," he adds.

El-Qoussi believes that incidents of violence will gradually decrease over the coming year, because about 80 per cent of schools are now applying the full-time day system, and the number of students per class has been reduced to about 40. He adds that the minister is also considering a proposal to mark students' discipline, to help the teacher keep discipline in class without resorting to physical punishment.



The Ides of March

For almost forty years now, I have always developed influenza, or at least a bad cold, at this time of year. The last few weeks' unsettled weather have vividly reminded me of my very first March cold. My mother had bought me a summer dress at the preview of the summer collection of some large department store. When I first saw it, I had very mixed feelings. I described the dress to myself as fussy, even gaudy, but since we children were not allowed an opinion, I abstained from commenting and thanked my mother profusely, showing an enthusiasm that I hardly felt. Whatever had possessed her, I asked myself in total bewilderment.

I soon congratulated myself, however, for withholding criticism, because the little number actually started to grow on me. It was so unlike what I usually wore. It was a downright frivolous little frock, made of cloqué nylon in pink and white checks, with a little black velvet bow at the neck, large plastic black buttons down the middle and a shiny black patent-leather belt. The material was sheer and crisp at the same time, and I wondered what my friends would say when they saw me. I had been invited to a party that evening and I suddenly decided that I would wear it for the occasion. "This is a summer dress," my mother warned, having read my thoughts. "Put it away now."

Since I was not completely sure of my friends' reaction, I decided to give the dress a trial run before the party. I waited for my mother to retire for her siesta and announced that I was going to the club. "In this weather?" asked my grandmother. I looked out of the window. A full-blown *khamassin* was in progress. I could not see the trees in the garden for the dust. "Yes," I said firmly. "The weather is fine."

I wrapped the new dress up and pushed it to the bottom of my bag. I went to the club, where I headed directly for the changing rooms. There was no one there. I could not even hear the usual tinkling of the spoon in the attendant's teacup. Good, I thought to myself. I will be able to look at myself in the large mirror. I proceeded to remove my blazer, warm turtleneck pullover, winter skirt, and stockings, then donned the new dress. I examined my reflection in the large mirror at leisure and, liking what I saw, tightened the belt a couple of notches, and emerged.

I made my appearance at the Lido expecting raised eyebrows, or at least a few disparaging comments from my envious friends, which would have confirmed my suspicion that the dress looked good. Nothing of the sort happened. The poolside, usually a beehive of activity, was completely deserted, its tiles covered in a thick layer of accumulating dust, which periodically flew one way or the other. The tablecloths were buffeted by the wind, and hundreds of dead leaves swam perilously in the pool.

Where was everybody? Had they been frightened away by a miserable gust of wind? I was shivering badly, but had no intention of giving up now. I would walk around for a while, I decided, and, in the unlikely event that I did not meet one of my friends, I would sit by the pool and order a nice cup of tea. It was easier said than done. Walking proved something of an ordeal. My hair stood on end, intent on lifting me off my feet. I was having a hard time seeing where I was going. My eyes, nose and throat were full of sand. My face was burning. Two of my front buttons kept coming undone, the buttonholes having been manufactured to withstand softer treatment. I could find no one who was remotely likely to prepare a cup of tea. I finally had to accept the evidence: the club had been completely abandoned to the *khamassin*, depriving me of my moment of glory.

Back in the changing rooms, I removed the nylon dress, which I liked far less now. With my disheveled hair and my red face covered in a sticky, gritty film of dust, I looked positively indecent; the impression was compounded by the two open buttons at the front. Furthermore, during my erratic walk, I had noticed that the material was more crisp than sheer, and unpleasantly itchy to boot. My whole body ached. I was happy none of my friends had been here to see me. I would have to think of a good excuse never to wear the thing again. Stuffing the offending object into my bag, I made my way home.

During the next few days, I was so ill with influenza that I completely forgot about the dress. As it happened, I never had to make up stories for not wearing it because before summer, my mother noticed that it was badly wrinkled and sent it to be ironed. Apparently this type of nylon, the ancestor of the new, improved variety, did not take kindly to a hot iron, and the dress was irreparably damaged. I made appropriate noises to indicate my disappointment, but rejoiced silently at my luck. I firmly believe that one is always revisited by one's sins, however, and not a month of March has passed since then without my catching a full-blown flu.

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Roast beef

Ingredients:
1 1/2 - 2 kg pot roast beef (whole piece)
1 onion (chopped)
8 cloves of garlic (sliced)
1 small carrot (diced)
1 small tomato (skinned and diced)
2 stalks of celery (cut into smaller pieces)
1/4 cup white vinegar
Salt + pepper + allspice + grated nutmeg
Butter

Method:
Towel dry the beef without washing it with water. In a large cooking pan, melt some butter and slightly brown the piece of beef on all sides in order to prevent it from drying. Do not over-brown. Remove from pan and add the onion and garlic. Stir-fry until golden, then add the beef. Season with all the spices. Stir for a few minutes then add the vinegar. Lower the heat and add the tomatoes, carrots and celery. Stir them all in. Cover and leave to cook over a very low flame. Turn the roast every now and then, taking care not to let it stick. You will not need to add water if it is cooked on very low flame, since water will toughen the meat. The beef will release enough water residue to be cooked in. In one hour or more, prick with a fork to make sure it is done. Remove the roast and leave to cool off. In the meantime, leave the sauce and vegetables to boil over medium heat until they thicken. Strain through a manual vegetable strainer to get a smooth, creamy brown sauce. Slice the roast beef and serve the sauce aside. Serve hot with boiled or puréed potatoes, or cold without the sauce.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Better feta

Andrew Steele goes Greek

It could be nothing other than a Greek restaurant, the Acropolis in Heliopolis. Its immaculate blue and white exterior rings memory bells of island life and intimate tavernas. The blue and white theme is continued past the portal, with crisp blue and white linen, gleaming blue and white paintwork and a lovely blue and white carpet whose pile we admired. A mural depicting (surprise, surprise!) the Acropolis adorns a whole wall. The atmosphere is all very on-a-terrace-by-the-sea. One will have to return in the summer, when the outdoor section comes alive.

It is a reasonably sized space, which would readily accommodate 40-50 diners. On the night of our repast, tinny Muzak filled the air. It was Muzak with a theme, however, and our eardrums were titillated to the velvety strains of eight different versions of *Love Story*.

The menu was a strange collection of pizza, pasta and rather dour international fare. It was extensive, however, and well categorised. We homed in on the Greek sections, which, although rather thin on the ground, offered a measure of promise.

The taramasalata was light, fishy and lemony, and, most importantly, not too pink. I find there is nothing worse than a bubblegum-coloured salad, as it can cast a pallor over one's appetite that can be hard to shift. The moussaka was meaty, creamy, and thoroughly delicious — heartening, considering the number of pretenders to this classic dish that can be found in the eateries of the capital. The meatballs were spicy and freshly cooked, rather lamby for my taste, but declared suitably scrumptious by my colleagues. A big hand for the starters. For the main, we got our lips around shrimps with rice, Greek taste as it was nattily monikered. Surprisingly, they came in a creamy, faintly tomatoey sauce; with plain white rice. Perhaps that's how it's done in Greece. The Chicken Souvlaki was a real treat, and came with fresh tzatziki on a bed of toothsome pita. The chicken was really rather fine, and not in the slightest bit stringy. The only hiccough was the French fries, which came instead of the rice ordered.

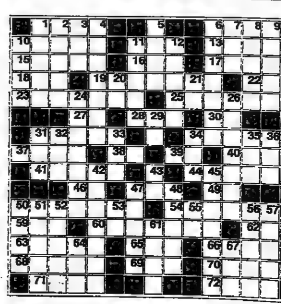
Warning: don't order the Greek salad. Although the lettuce was crisp and crunchy, the feta was distinctly damp and rubbery and gave the sensation of eating a piece of carpet underlay. Additionally, it left an unwelcome and peculiar after-taste. We asked for olive oil, as the salad was completely undressed, but none could be found. Bah and humbug. Sad salad aside, the presentation was generally good and unfussy, and the food good enough to recommend to friends. The total for two, with a bottle of Egyptian wine and two good Turkish coffees, was an affordable LE147. Next time you have a hankering for the Hellenic, drop in.

The Acropolis, 82 Abu Bakr Al-Saddiq Street, Midan Safir, Heliopolis
Tel: 4178565

Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

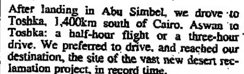


ACROSS
1. Delighted (4)
6. Make raw; crack in skin (4)
10. Wine basis (5)
11. Drunk (3)
13. Biblical king (5)
15. Multitudes; hotel keepers (5)
16. Suffix forming nouns of result (3)
17. Result; come afterwards (5)
18. Farm animal (3)
19. Persuader (7)
22. Corrida cheer (3)
23. Furious (7)
25. Patrons (7)
27. Abb. of a medical title (2)
28. Affirmative vote (3)
30. Holy person, abb. (2)
31. Handbag; wallet (5)
34. The place concerned (5)
37. Emanation (4)
38. ... and behold (2)
39. Univ. deg. in lit. (2)
40. French for "laugh" (4)
41. Inhale; smell in the air (5)
44. Inert gas used in fluorescent lamps (5)
46. Depart (2)
47. Barn sound (3)
49. Ma's mate (2)
50. Penny-pinching; national income (7)
54. Bricklayer, mason or house contractor (7)
59. Parasitic larvae infesting cattle (3)
60. Elsa of movie fame (7)
62. Miss Braun (3)
63. High isolated steep hill (5)
65. Step (3)
66. Shoot of a willow (5)
68. Curl one's up; score (5)
69. First lady (3)
70. Russian river flowing to the Ukraine (5)
71. Waiter's equipment (4)
72. Shade trees (4)

DOWN
1. Progressed; cultivated (5)
2. Searing ray (5)
3. Tending towards; appropriate (3)
4. Models; shapes out a course (7)
5. Revered mentor (4)
6. Hold dear; nurture (7)
7. Layer (3)
8. Pyromania (5)
9. Young domestic fowl (5)
10. Type of cooking fat (4)
11. Friend (5)
12. City in Saudi Arabia (5)
14. Actress Sandra et al (4)
20. The Balkans, abb. (2)
21. Elevated railway (2)
24. Denounce; censure; indict (7)
26. Timeless (7)
29. Before, prefix (2)
31. Purulent matter (3)
32. Amphora (3)
33. Kobold; brownie (3)
34. Increase in power, quantity and extent (3)
35. ...Cuiarto, Argentina (3)
36. Sea eagle (3)
42. Antics; absurdity (7)
43. Negation (2)
45. Incident; sequel (7)
47. Short-sighted person (5)
48. Portly (5)
50. Recedes; declines (4)
51. Tally up; noble man (5)
52. Semi-aquatic mammal (5)
53. Musical note (2)
55. Personal pronoun (2)
56. Belief in existence of supreme being arising from reason (5)
37. Levels; regulates (5)
58. ... avis (4)
61. Armada (4)
64. Pekoe (3)
67. French for salt (3)

Last week's solution

هكذا: من الأصل



The garden at the edge of the world

In Toshka, **Samir Sobhi** discovers Adam and Eve, optimism, crocodiles and flowers

After landing in Abu Simbel, we drove to Toshka, 1,400km south of Cairo. Aswan to Toshka: a half-hour flight or a three-hour drive. We preferred to drive, and reached our destination, the site of the vast new desert reclamation project, in record time.

The site of the project and its name are evocative: In Nubian, Toshka literally means "the place of the good sapling". In the heart of this Nubian desert, were there ever green fields, blooming gardens and flowers? Can we create a new "paradise" on this desert site, when Lake Nasser surrounds it on all sides?

We are now in Wadi Kom Ombo. From Daraw, in Aswan, the valley stretches for miles. The river flows to the west.

The earliest remnants of Egypt's Stone Age were discovered here. The artifacts are sharp tools and geometrical objects which look like pyramids. The inhabitants of this region may have rubbed pieces of this rock together, and, perhaps, a spark was ignited.

It smells of history here. The names of places contain the words *kom* (land), *tel* (hillock) and *hagar* (stone). Thus, Kom Ombo is the "land of gold" or "Nuba". Nuba is derived from *bint*, *binia* and *ibno* (son or daughter), which became *ombo* in Arabic.

The region has hosted more than its share of Egyptian myths. It is said to have been ruled by two brothers: Horus — virtue incarnate — and Set, the embodiment of all that is vile and evil. For his evil, Set was transformed into a crocodile.

Egyptian and foreign archaeologists come here in their search for the origins of Egyptian civilisation. Their labours have shed light on the life of the Ancient Egyptians, the earliest human settlements, and the beginnings of societies based on animal husbandry.

There are plans for an archaeological research centre to be established in Toshka. Perhaps it will be named after renowned Egyptian archaeologist Ahmed Fakhri, who so loved the desert.

There is also talk of a Pharaonic city, which would attract tourists from everywhere, but would also house the new pioneers. According to the minister of public works and water resources, the city's schools, health centre, mosque, clubs and other buildings would be built in keeping with the architecture of the civilisation which once flourished here.

The era of the "new Delta" is dawning. Water is plentiful, but must be channelled into this valley before this Delta of the south is born. The Ministry of Public Works and Water Resources is the main player in this huge project.

The Mohamed Ali Barrage, the Aswan Dam and the High Dam have all made a difference in the life of the Egyptians. Now there are new needs, to which new generations of dam-builders must cater. The southern stretches of the Western Desert: can they really become the lush farmlands of the south?

At the site, rocks have already been smashed to smithereens. The explosions still echo through the valley. Trucks are moving to and fro, bearing huge sacks of cement. Workers are in a frenzy of activity, water is being pumped from the wells. A forest is being sown, greenhouse crops planted, irrigation techniques being tried out.

The road for four-wheel drive vehicles leading to the site is being widened. Pyramidal mountains can be seen in the distance. The concern for the afterlife which seems to have plagued human beings since they were expelled from paradise was resolved by the inhabitants of this valley. Perhaps they drew their inspiration from nature, and laid their dead to rest in pyramids which resembled the mountains of their homeland, preserving their bodies for millennia.



And the desert will bloom: The first greenhouse plant nursery in Toshka *photo: Ahmed Abdel-Raziq*

Near the Sheikh Zayed Canal, the noise is deafening. It rips through the silence of the desert.

We remember the High Dam, and the debate which set the pages of *Al-Ahram* alight. Had it not been for the Dam, we would not be creating this new valley today. So far, half a billion pounds have been spent on the Toshka project, and an equal amount has been allocated.

A young engineer speaks about the well with affection. The water from this well is pure, he assures us. "The well," he says proudly, "cost LE250,000. President Mubarak visited us four times, and he himself inaugurated the first well. We are planning to dig 21 wells, each to irrigate an average area of 150-200 feddans. The wells operate by electricity... We have already grown cucumbers, green beans and zucchini in this desert!"

Cultivating arid land is the real challenge. Rows of trees and palms surround the canal. The crops grown here are free from pesticides and artificial fertilisers. Experiments will be carried out to see whether sunflowers can grow here.

We visit the forest and greenhouse which people have named after Minister of Agriculture Youssef Wali. Here, experiments on crops suited to the arid climate are being carried out.

In the flurry of ideas, it is suggested that silt from the bottom and banks of the lake be brought to the new area.

Ibrahim Nafie has said that this project "will resolve the incompatibility between population and land resources. Invading the desert is a challenge and a duty. There is no more space in the old Nile Valley."

The engineers live in rows of prefabricated houses. They spend 45 days on the site, then go home for ten to fifteen days. All the workers complain that their fare home is too high. They have felt the pinch less since the Luxor massacre, and wish the trip back and forth did not make such a dent in their salaries.

Over 250,000 people work here. The Beheira Company is responsible for the digging and dredging of the canal, a waterway 30m wide, 58m deep and 70km long. The drilling machine, an attractive monster, cost four million dollars. The minister of military production is commissioning two more units of heavy equipment for the project.

Rain is unknown here. Cultivation of the land is set to begin in 2001. Two hundred feddans will be earmarked for experiments and research.

The sky here is cloudless, and the lake is smooth and transparent.

The Temple of Abu Simbel is now at the top of the plateau, its former location now submerged beneath the lake. Ramses II, barefoot, with his beloved wife Nefertari at his side, saved from another deluge...

The village of Abu Simbel is swarming with workers. The cafes are full of clients, some watching television on an old set. The picture is extraordinarily clear.

The village receiving more newcomers everyday. Many come in vans from Al-Arish, seeking work opportunities in the southern stretches of the valley. The population of the village has doubled in less than a year.

Egypt's future is being made, here in the south. Engineer Abdel-Fattah Mohsen explains: "The Toshka gorge is 25km south of the High Dam, and the catchment basin is to the west. The canal in between protects the High Dam from dangerous floods like the one which occurred in 1996, when the water level rose from 175 to 182 metres in the lake. The water runs off into the catchment basin when the level of the lake rises above 178 metres.

The Sheikh Zayed Canal is a different hydraulic system. Water is pumped into the canal by a pumping station that can lift 25 million cubic metres of water a day. The canal carries the water to the "new valley", where it will irrigate approximately half a million feddans.

Professor Rushdi Said is cautious, but not opposed to this huge scheme. He emphasises the importance of keeping the canal free of pollution.

Investments have poured in: projects include spas, hotels, a botanical garden, camel racing...

Possible petroleum discoveries? Fingers are crossed. The minister of petroleum explains that, in Kom Ombo alone, $31 million have been earmarked for research and exploration activities.

A new petroleum exploration plan will be implemented as of this April: four to six wells will be drilled in the Kom Ombo region.

Work has been underway since early last year on a well in Kom Ombo. Research has confirmed the existence of new fossil fuel resources. The minister of petroleum has declared that 75 per cent of the drilling complex in Toshka has been completed. The total cost of the complex is estimated at LE40 million, and its fuel capacity is 12,000 tons.

Every day, a new, exciting incident takes place here, on the edge of the world. This month, a well said to be 8,000 years old was discovered 40km from the canal. A sculpture on a limestone rock weighing 2.5 tons has been found.

The only facility lacking is a railway line to connect Aswan to Abu Simbel. A railway would accelerate settlement in the region.

Ramses II stands on the plateau, Nefertari at his side, the vast lake rippling placidly at their feet. The hive of activity below is no garden, for now. But the flowers are already growing.

Stitches in time

From hair care to literacy to handicrafts: one of Egypt's oldest local NGOs is still going strong in Upper Egypt. **Mariz Tadros** stops by

Students at the primary school in the hamlet of Neguila used to be unable to concentrate on their lessons. Decisive action was necessary to root out the tiny culprits: lice. The Association of Upper Egypt for Education and Development, which established the school and several others like it in Upper Egypt, devised an original approach to deal with the epidemic. At the beginning of each year, the teachers would choose one student, and show him or her how to use disinfectant to wash out the lice. Students in the same family (immediate or extended) were then encouraged to wash each other's hair. It became so popular that students started having their own competitions.

To many, this may seem a somewhat petty activity for the school to undertake, but for teachers working in the underprivileged villages of Upper Egypt, where the level of education is low and hygiene awareness even lower, every effort to increase students' receptivity is absolutely necessary.

Established in 1941, the Association of Upper Egypt is perhaps one of the oldest local non-governmental initiatives. Its original aim was — and still is — to boost enrolment in rural primary schools. The Association, however, is perhaps more renowned for its income-generating activities in Akhmim, Sohag and Hagaza, Qena. Its products are regularly shown at an annual exhibition. This year's event, which ended mid-March, was held under the auspices of Mrs Suzanne Mubarak and inaugurated by Minister of Social Affairs Mervat Tellawi and Minister of Education Hussein Kamel Bahaaeddin. The 150 girls of the Akhmim community work all year preparing for this event, weaving, embroidering, and experimenting with old and new stitches.

One of the oldest towns in the world, and the hub of handmade textile production until the 19th century, Akhmim in Sohag is renowned for its weaving tradition. The centre, established in 1960, has managed to create its own niche in Akhmim, reviving and refining almost forgotten stitches and skills. The very fact that the workers are all girls and women is singular in a town where women have traditionally played a somewhat secondary role in the weaving industry. It was generally believed that women did not have the strength and endurance to work at a loom. In fact, the girls have surpassed the men and are producing complicated, multi-coloured cloth at the looms.

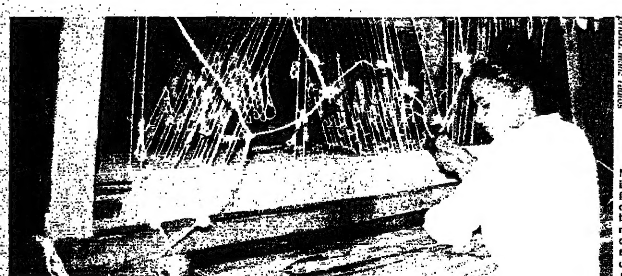


photo: Mariz Tadros

More than just independence: for the women of Akhmim, handicrafts can make all the difference in their standard of living

The process of learning the trade is long and intense: a newcomer spends two years as an apprentice, with mandatory literacy classes. Women spend long hours every day learning stitches passed from one generation of weavers to the next. May, a volunteer at the Association and a curator at the Egyptian Museum, has introduced designs preserved in the Islamic and Coptic museums to the community centre in Akhmim, where they are reproduced or adapted to weaving needs. "There are designs from the Coptic and Islamic eras that are very specific. One was found on a ceramic piece at the Islamic Museum, another on a bowl from the Fatimid era... The girls see whether such designs can be adapted as stitches," she explains.

The women also create new designs. At 26, Shadia has been making her own creations for the last 10 years. After she got married and had her children, however, she could no longer join the excursions on which the women seek inspiration. Her father's house, situated in the middle of the fields, is now the place she turns to. "I go up to the roof and look for ideas for my next creation. I take note of everything going on around me and draw it in my mind, then I go back and draw it on paper and start choosing from the different-coloured silk threads."

These pieces are sold for LE300-1,000 on average at the Association's annual exhibition. The money goes directly to the artist at the end of each year. For Sa'diya, the few thousand she earns this way each year make all the difference. She won't say exactly how much she makes, however: "Even my husband doesn't know. Why should he? With the money I make, I don't need to ask him for anything. I can buy what I want, like gold jewellery. This work has given me autonomy." Raous, who joined the centre 25 years ago, finds that the extra income has meant more than just financial independence. "My husband is a carpenter and he doesn't make much. I have relied on my income to get all four of my children through school. I couldn't have done it otherwise." There are also female-headed households which, in a town where there are not many work opportunities for women, rely fully on these earnings. The work is hard, but hours are flexible — usually from 8.00am to 1.00pm. The only requirement is that the women must be at least 15-years-old.

Apart from hand-made tablecloths, pictures, tapestries, bedspreads, scarves and pillows, people flock to the annual exhibition for large wooden plates and bowls, statues and ornaments, all hand-made at the Youth Centre in Hagaza, established in 1990. Although Hagaza is predominantly agricultural, it has a tradition of carpentry work. At least five different local kinds of wood are used in creating these objects, including mulberry, orange and jojoba. At the end of a three-year training period, members of the Youth Centre are familiar with the entire process of creation, from cutting down the tree to trimming it, treating it for worms, then carving it. Yohanna Beshir, one of the instructors at the centre, points out that unemployment, demographic isolation and economic austerity were all making it increasingly difficult for youth to find a way to earn a living.

At any given time, there are around a dozen trainees involved in the woodwork project, but during the summer holidays there are at least 20. Two groups of apprentices have already graduated, and have been encouraged to set up their own projects through interest-free loans given through the Association. Twenty-something Osama completed his training last year and managed to find a place to convert into a workshop, but he complains that, as is the case in a great many cottage industries, he is confronted with a major marketing problem. The woodwork centre trains young people to produce modest furniture, but also elaborate pieces of art which are beyond the purchasing capability of the local villagers. Better-off villagers pay Osama around LE100 to carve a *tabliya* (large, low round table used in the countryside) with ornate legs.

The Upper Egypt Association has been the prime outlet for the woodwork, but, once the apprenticeship is complete, the young people are encouraged to diversify their marketing outlets. "I even tried Hurghada to see whether I could market my work there, but there were no opportunities, so now I try and sell through bazaars and exhibitions in Luxor," says Osama, whose average monthly income is around LE400. He could make a little more if he did basic carpentry using poorer-quality wood, "but I can't do that — I'm an artist, not a carpenter," he says defiantly.

The marketing dilemma has meant that not all the former apprentices continue to practice the profession, which is why they wait all year for exhibitions like the annual event held in Cairo by the Association. The women at Akhmim, whose sole marketing outlet is this exhibition, have even more reason to hold their breath.



Not since its inception a century ago have the Egyptian Museum's displays been so organised. **Nevine El-Aref** toured the improved sections







The treasures on the second floor, which include the Tutankhamun collection and Middle Kingdom jewellery, can now be seen to advantage *photos: Khaled El-Fiqi*

A new slant on ancient treasure

The Egyptian Museum was designed to accommodate a limited number of objects. When these were sharply increased by newly-discovered objects — 5,000 from Tutankhamun's Tomb alone — not to mention discoveries from Tanis, Fayoum, Dakhla Oasis and elsewhere, they were packed into existing space, not always the most appropriate position for historical context. The museum soon became disparagingly described as "Cairo's storehouse of Pharaonic antiquities."

This has now changed. Renovations to the museum during the past year have included the installation of new lighting, ventilation and air-conditioning, plus the re-arrangement of objects. The results are a joy to behold, particularly on the second floor of the museum. A chamber on the ground floor will also be opened shortly.

Three adjoining rooms on the second floor are devoted to treasures from Tutankhamun's collection, jewellery from other sites and objects from Tanis.

Museum Director Mohamed Saleh explained that the reorganisation has involved everything from repainting, cleaning and replacing damaged tiles, to decorating the chambers in order to accommodate new showcases. The showcases used in two of the chambers are new and made of unbreakable glass. Those found in Tutankhamun's Hall are original, but are now clean, shining and more attractively positioned.

"These are the most wonderful objects ever excavated, and they deserve the best treatment, both in terms of display and safety," said Saleh. "The use of fibre optic lighting allows visitors to admire the treasures in bright light, while protecting them from the destructive rays of the sun."

It has been a collaborative effort all round. The renovation of the jewellery chambers was carried out by the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA), in collaboration with foreign organisations and institutes. The room devoted to Tutankhamun's jewels alone cost LE400,000, financed by a donation from the Dutch government. The other two rooms, devoted to the Hetep-Heres funerary objects, and jewels dating back to the Middle Kingdom and discovered in El-Lahun and elsewhere, cost LE200,000. They were financed by the Dutch Organisation for International Cultural Cooperation, the American Research Centre in Egypt (ARCE) and the Fulbright Commission. Contributions also came from Egyptian businessmen. Ahmed Ezz, head of the Tenth of Ramadan Investors Association, provided tiles for the halls. Mohamed Shafiq Gabr, chairman of Artoc group, Mohamed Shabrawi, owner of a travel agency, and businessman Mohamed Metwalli all pitched in.

One hall is devoted to jewels of the kings and queens of the early dynastic period and the Old Kingdom. It is dominated by a magnificent gold statue of a hawk, the eyes of which are stabilised by polished obsidian rods passing through the head. It dates to the Sixth Dynasty and was found in Herakleopolis (ancient Nekhen near Edfu).

Other objects in the room belong to King Djer of the First Dynasty, King Sekhem-khet of the third, and Ptah-Shepses of the sixth.

The collection of the queens' jewels includes anklets, necklaces, bracelets, earrings and mirrors. "These items belonged to Queen At-Hathur, the daughter of King Senusert II and Queen Mirrette, the daughter of King Senusert III and other Middle Kingdom members of the royal family including Werret and Khenumet, daughters of Amnemhat II," Saleh said. Saleh pointed out the objects belonging to Queen Iyah-Hetep, mother of Ahmose I, "father of the New Kingdom." Jewels found at Dakhla Oasis and Fayoum are also on display in this chamber as well as items of the Greaco-Roman period.

Next to this room is the Tutankhamun Hall where the boy king's most spectacular golden treasures and sarcophagus are exhibited. Visitors can now move around the well-displayed objects and see their craftsmanship from different angles. Tutankhamun is at last getting his due.

The third room is the newly-organised hall for displaying the treasures from Tanis. These are remarkable, but long-overlooked pieces, in many ways equal to the Tut collection. The discovery was made in 1939 when the threat of war was hanging over Europe and Pierre Montet, the French archaeologist who made the discovery, had his excavations interrupted by the situation at the time.

"The objects include jewellery, funerary objects and a dazzling coffin, unique in that it was fashioned in solid silver with the head of a falcon," said Salah. The objects came from five tombs in San El-Haggar, Tanis and Sharqiya Governorate and date back to the 21st and 22nd dynasties (950-850 BC).

"The Tanis treasures have never been properly publicised because at the time of the discovery, world media was focused on news of the war," Saleh said. "Until now, they have tended to be overlooked in favour of Tutankhamun's better known and costlier collection. With the new museum arrangements, however, the Tanis collection stands out in its own right."

The reason why it is now possible to highlight the display of items is that space is being created. For example, the Nubia collection from the royal burial at Ballana, which occupied a whole chamber on the ground floor of the museum, has now been transferred to the new Nubia Museum in Aswan. The unique collection of Old Kingdom furniture, hitherto on the second floor, has now been moved to the ground floor where it will join the Old Kingdom monuments.

"Hetep-Heres was the mother of Khufu, builder of the Great Pyramid," explained Saleh. "Her collection includes gold and silver anklets, bracelets and earrings inlaid with precious and semi-precious stones as well as a complete set of bedroom furniture, including a bed, carrying chair, armchair and jewel box. They are now on display in a special room on the ground floor, in the Old Kingdom section where they belong, beside the statues of her sons and the reliefs of her husband."

The collection was discovered in 1923 and 1924 near Khufu's pyramid complex in Giza and was painstakingly restored to its original splendour. "The chamber will be officially opened to the public in March," Saleh said.

Restoring Egypt's image abroad

This month, Egypt participated in the Milan and Berlin tourism exchanges. Both were a chance for Egyptian officials, travel agents and hoteliers to persuade foreign tour operators to restore Egypt to their itineraries. **Rehab Saad** reports

Egypt's participation in the Milan tourism exchange in Italy and the ITB (Internationale Tourismus Bourse) in Germany this year was different from any other. In previous years Egyptian participants competed among themselves to make the most deals and draw the greatest number of tourists. This year the tourism conventions were mainly used to help ease the impact of last November's Luxor massacre and, at the same time, try to encourage tourists to return to Egypt. Officials called it the "hard mission" which necessitated a great deal of effort, preparation and explanation — especially about the security situation in Egypt.

The mission in Milan, participants said, was easier than that of Berlin and its results were more positive. The German tourism market has been hit hard by the Luxor attack and by last September's tourist bus attack in Tahrir Square. According to statistics, December witnessed a 70 per cent decrease in the number of German tourists compared to December 1996.

In spite of the drop, however, Egyptian participants from the public and private sectors did not lose hope. They were able to convince foreign tour operators and tourism decision-makers to hold industry conferences in Egypt in the near future.

The federation of Italian travel agencies will hold its annual meeting in Egypt in January 1999, which should help Italian travel agencies to put Egypt in mind, and the next general meeting of German travel agencies (DRV) will be held in Egypt next October. "Such a meeting will have a positive effect on the German market in particular and the European market in general," said Minister of Tourism Mamdouh El-Beltagui.

In both the Italian and German events, there were positive signs that a gradual restoration of the tourism movement to Egypt is possible. In Milan, Egyptians concentrated on promoting upcoming cultural and tourist events — especially the celebrations marking new archaeological discoveries, the summer shopping festival, the fourth international song festival and the October production of the opera *Aida* in Luxor.

"We also promoted our planned special celebrations for the advent of the third millennium. We will be having an event on the Pyramids Plateau where 2000 children are going to hold candles and run towards Khufu Pyramid. Also, with Italian cooperation, we are going to install the missing part of the top of the Khufu Pyramid in gold," El-Beltagui told the *Weekly*.

One of the most important announcements at the ITB was that Tui, one of the largest German travel agencies, will be opening a hotel of the Robinson Club chain for the first time in Egypt, at Abu Souma on the Red Sea coast. "They decided to go ahead with this project despite the fact that the occupancy rates this year are low, but as a show of support for Egypt and also because they have a direct interest in promoting German investments in Egypt," said El-Beltagui. Also, two major German travel agents published special brochures on Egypt in an effort to encourage tourists during the coming seasons. At the ITB, new destinations at Taba, Nuweiba and the Western Desert were also marketed.

Perhaps one of the most successful missions was to convince Germans that Egypt's new security procedures are sufficient to ensure that tourists are safe in Egypt. "This explanation, which was the focus of a press conference on the first day of the event, and which was attended by a number of German tourist officials and media men, was very useful for the major tour operators whom I met," the minister said.

Unfortunately, the German TV station, ZDF, had screened a negative report about security measures in Luxor just before the ITB started. "This report had a negative impact on our mission at the beginning," said El-Beltagui. "In the light of this, our mission to encourage Germans to come back to Egypt was especially difficult. It is clear that our efforts need to be continual at least until next October."

Land of the great rock

During the centuries of occupation, the Romans quarried stone in Egypt on a large scale. Now a Japanese mission have discovered the largest stone-cutting workshop ever found in the country. **Samir Naoum** travelled to the newly discovered site

Quarrying has been an important activity in Egypt since ancient times. Techniques have naturally changed over time, as have the requirements of builders and architects. Now a site has been discovered by a Japanese mission in Middle Egypt which will shed considerable light on the methods of quarrying that were used in Roman times.



photo: Samir Naoum

The Roman column is still attached to the bedrock

"We have found evidence of what used to be a factory where stones were shaped according to the use to which they would be put. The finished stones would be transported to larger cities like Alexandria, and there are indications that they were carried on barges along the Nile," said field director Hiroki Kwanish of Japan's Tsocoba University.

Tahna Al-Gabal is situated east of the Nile at Minya. Kwanish, who described the site as a most exciting discovery, said that the mission planned to proceed in two stages. First, they would continue with the excavations they had begun earlier of tombs of high priests and high-ranking officials who were buried in the region during the Middle Kingdom in the period around 2000BC. This phase will include the so-called "Fraser Tombs, located to the south of Tahna Al-Gabal. Then they would go on to draw up a topographical map of the area."

"The task of determining the location of the excavation sites, next to a rainwater trench to the north-east of the ruins of the ancient city, has just been completed," Kwanish said. "Close to it there are four massive rocks. Their presence suggested to the mission that the gates of the ancient city might be buried there."

Work got under way. Digging revealed the existence of three strata. The uppermost consisted of black soil containing architectural elements made of stone, as well as broken clay-ware and glazed pottery of different ages from the Ptolemaic to Islamic periods, that is, between 332BC to the seventh century AD. The second layer was reddish in colour, "due to the presence of large amounts of broken clay-ware whose texture resembles that of light red, finely ground pottery material. This suggested it may have been the site of a pottery manufacture," said Kwanish. At the very bottom of this layer, statues and pieces of inscribed stone (*ostracon*) were found, together with the remains of mud-brick walls dating back to the Ptolemaic period.

"We lifted them up and, after documenting them, we moved on to the third layer. At first, we found some rather small stones. These had been placed beneath the larger ones to help in hewing and shaping them," said Kwanish. "This indicated that the quarries south of Tahna Al-Gabal were used for cutting massive blocks of stone which were then hauled over to the workshops for hewing, trimming and shaping into different parts of columns and other architectural elements. In that third layer, several unfinished columns were found."

The only unfinished monument which had hitherto been found in Egypt was the obelisk discovered in a granite quarry in Aswan. This would have been the largest obelisk in the country, but was abandoned due to faults in the rock, and left still attached to the bedrock.

South-east of Minya, the newly-discovered quarry is in a limestone area, and the unfinished Roman columns are less remarkable for their size than for their delicacy and elegance.

During the early Roman era, the quarrying industry was very important as settlement expanded all over the country. The method used by the Romans for shaping stones comprised a number of steps. First, the general design was marked out. Small stones were then placed underneath the main mass which was then roughly hewn using a variety of tools. Other tools were then used to shape and smooth down the final product.

"When we finally removed all the debris around the columns, we found about 20 bronze coins of the Roman and Coptic eras, as well as a set of oil lamps," said Kwanish. The mission has found an assortment of artifacts including pottery handles that were stamped with the Greek alphabet, *ostraca* engraved in Coptic, and fragments of hollow terra-cotta statues of Greek and Roman deities, as well as of the Egyptian goddess Isis and the dancing dwarf Bes.

With the discovery of this large stone-cutting workshop, the team has now stopped work for the season, but Tahna Al-Gabal will once again be the scene of much activity once the autumn comes.

Site tours

Buses

Super Jet, East Delta and West Delta buses operate throughout Egypt.

Super Jet

Super Jet stations are located in Almaza (Heliopolis), Tahrir, Giza, Ramsis Street and Cairo Airport. Buses travel to Alexandria, Port Said, Hurghada and Sinai. Tel: 772-663

Cairo-Alexandria
Services almost every half hour from 5.30am to 10pm, from Tahrir, then Giza, Almaza and the airport. Tickets LE19 until 9pm; LE21 thereafter; from the airport LE24 until 5pm; LE30 thereafter.
A VIP bus with phone access leaves Almaza at 7.15am. Tickets from Almaza LE28; from the airport LE32 each way.

Cairo-Marsa Matruh
Services at 7am departure and 7pm return from Almaza and Tahrir Square. Tickets LE36.
Cairo-Sidi Abdel-Rahman
Services at 6.30am, 7am, 8am, 9am and 3.45pm. Tickets LE32
Cairo-Port Said
Services every half hour from 6am to 8am; then 9am, 10am, 3pm, and 4.30pm, from Almaza, then Ramsis Street. Tickets LE15 each way.

Alexandria-Port Said
Service 6.45am, from Ramleh Square in Alexandria. Departs Port Said 3.30pm. Tickets LE22 each way.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 8am and 2pm, from Tahrir, then Giza and Almaza. Departs Hurghada noon and 5pm. Tickets LE40 until 5pm, LE45 thereafter, both each way.

Alexandria-Hurghada
Service 8pm, from Ramleh Square, Alexandria. Departs Hurghada 2.30pm. Tickets LE60 each way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Service 11pm, from Tahrir, then Almaza. Departs Sharm El-Sheikh 11pm. Tickets LE50 each way

Trains

Trains run to Alexandria, Port Said, Luxor and Aswan, from Ramsis Station. Tel. 147 or 575-3555.

Cairo-Luxor-Aswan
"French" deluxe trains with sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 7.40pm and 9pm (reaching Luxor 6.40am and 8am, Aswan 8.40am and 10am).
Tickets to Luxor LE294 for foreigners and LE129 for Egyptians, to Aswan LE300 for foreigners, LE141 for Egyptians.
"Spanish" deluxe trains without sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 6.45pm, 7.45pm and 9.45pm. Tickets to Luxor: first class LE51; second class LE31. Tickets to Aswan: first class LE63; second class LE37.

Cairo-Alexandria
"Torbini" trains
VIP train: Service 8am. Tickets first class LE32 with a meal, LE22 without a meal.
Standard trains: Services 9am, 11am, noon, 5pm and 7pm. Tickets first class LE22; second class LE17.
"French" trains
Services hourly from 6am to 10.30pm. Tickets first class LE20; second class LE12.

Cairo-Port Said
Services 6.20am and 8.45am. Tickets first class LE45; second class LE26.

EgyptAir

There are between two and five domestic flights daily. Check EgyptAir: Adly 390-0999; Opera 390-2444; or Hilton 772410.

Cairo-Aswan
Tickets LE351 for Egyptians, $177 plus LE5 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Luxor
Tickets LE199 for Egyptians, $128 plus LE5 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Hurghada
Tickets LE229 for Egyptians, $69 plus LE5 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Tickets LE232 for Egyptians, $72 plus LE5 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Compiled by **Rehab Saad**

Making a racket

Women squash players are determined not to be sidelined — and certainly not the eight who qualified for this week's World Squash Grand Prix finals in Hurghada. Inas Mazhar joins them by the Red Sea shore

The world's women squash players had to make their way through a gruelling series of major events last year, in order to qualify for the first-ever Grand Prix finals being organised by the Al-Ahram Organisation.

"Women competed in eight major championships right across the world, collecting points. The top eight qualified for these first-time finals," said Andrew Shelley, director of the Women Squash Players' Association (WSPA). Shelley stressed the attractions of the magnificent Hurghada location which he thinks will help promote the game.

The eight players were divided into two pools. Each player played three matches. The first and second from each group have qualified for today's semi-finals, and the final will be played tomorrow.

It should be a cause for celebration, since for the first time prize money on the WSPA World Tour has crashed through the $500,000 barrier. Not a huge total compared with some other more lucrative sports, but still a rise of nearly 40 per cent.

Celebration yes, but a muted one. As WSPA President Sarah Fitz-Gerald commented, "The girls are worth a million at the very least, so we are only half way to our first target! We are delighted with the progress we are making, though the champagne is still on ice."

It is still hard work for the top ten to make a living, and not feasible at all for those further down. However, things are moving in the right direction.

"The WSPA membership figures are rising, and the number of countries offering players has increased. In 1996 there were 135 playing members, but twelve months later the figure had already swelled to 164. England and Australia may dominate numerically, but virtually all of Europe is represented, as are all the other continents. Despite only hosting one small tournament each at present, Italy and Japan, for example, can boast 20 players between them," said Shelley.

"The most startling growth came from the USA. In twelve months the prize fund in the states shot up from $50,000 to nearly $150,000. Despite the country not boasting its own superstar, women's squash is very definitely in vogue," Shelley continued.

The present tour has been strongly supported by Malaysia and Australia, and Canada and New Zealand are also expected to be back on line soon.

However, perhaps the most significant aspect of 1997 was the inclusion of a women's championship in Cairo. Playing the major matches at night on the glass court beside the Pyramids has turned out to be a major publicity coup, both for the sport and for Egypt. "To be part of this event, linked as it was with the excellent Heliopolis Open, was a thrill indeed for the top women players," said Shelly. Now, in the wake of the Al-Ahram and Heliopolis championships comes the prestigious World Grand Prix in Hurghada to cement the country's reputation as a world squash centre. "The first playing of this major event is a milestone for international women's squash and so there is a great debt to pay the organisers and holiday resort who are hosting it," the WSPA director concluded.



Highly strung? — A tense moment on the glass court in Hurghada *photo: Hossam Diab*

Who, then, are the lucky eight who have made it to Hurghada? Top-ranked woman in the world is Sarah Fitz-Gerald. After many years of effort, she finally won the World Open title in autumn 1996. April '97 saw her runner up to Michelle Martin in the Leekes British Open, and in May she picked up the Las Vegas Open title beating Liz Irving 3-0. In June she beat Michelle Martin 3-0 twice in close succession at Al-Ahram International in Egypt and the Boz Grand Prix in Germany. This was immediately followed by taking the first ever World Games Squash title in Lahti, Finland.

Michelle Martin is currently world-ranked number 2. She was on the scene for some years before taking the top spot vacated by Susan Devoy at the end of 1992. In 1997, she focused to regain her pre-eminence and in her first tour event of the year, she beat Rebecca Macree 3-2 in the Cup Olympics as well as holding her British Open title beating Fitz-Gerald 3-1 in a thrilling final.

Third place in the world rankings is currently held by Sue Wright. Her career first took off when she won the British Under-16s and later captained the England side which won the World Juniors in 1987. However, her greatest moment to date came in 1991 when she sensationally beat World Number 1 Susan Devoy in the quarter-finals of the British Open, and went on to reach the final before succumbing to Lise Opie.

World number 4 is Cassie Jackman from England. She was runner-up in the JSM Supersquash in 1993 and in 1994 reached the final of the World Open. She repeated the final slot in 1996 where she lost to Sarah Fitz-Gerald, having won a pulsating semi-final, 10-8 in the fifth, against Liz Irving the previous day.

World number 5, Australian Carol Owens, aged 26, has been making steady progress up the rankings ladder. In 1989, she took third place in the World Junior Individual event. Carol then beat Liz Irving in the Weymulter semis. It was these successes, together with semi-final slots in the Singapore and Australian opens, and several quarter-final berths, that took her into the World Top Five.

World-ranked number 6, Germany's Sabine Schoene, aged 23, is a very seasoned performer on the international stage. For eight years she has been competing in women's events, while in her early years she won several junior titles. She has won the senior German Championship eight times and was runner-up in the World Juniors in 1991.

World-ranked number 7, Suzanne Horner of England, has fallen a little from her best position as number two in 1995, but even though she is 34-years-old, she should not be written off just yet. The last few years have seen the Englishwoman playing some of her best squash. In 1994, the past British Open runner-up won the US Open and in 1995 and 1996 took the European Champion of Champions title as well as reaching the last four in the Guensey Open, British Open and Jain International in Korea. The year 1996 started on a high note when she captured the British Championship title, having been forced to retire during the semis with a back injury the year before. This year was concluded with a trip to Lapland where she won the Finnish Open.

British Liz Irving, world-ranked number 8, already has a distinguished playing career and, having turned 30 years of age, she is producing some good squash. She emerged as a top liner in the mid-80s and has been consistently in the upper ranking since then. She led the Australian team that won the World Team Championship and has herself taken a number of individual titles. In addition to being a WSPA board member, Irving is also the players' representative on the World Federation Rules Committee.



Forcing a way through: Egypt takes on Africa *photo: Salah Ibrahim*

The curse of the Pharaohs

Lining up for the African tournaments, Egypt's three top teams still have some way to go to reproduce the collective genius they found in Ougadougou. Abeer Anwar isn't holding her breath

Three Egyptian teams are playing in the preliminaries of the African Cup Winners and League Winners Championships. But someone seems to have cast a spell over them, since the national team (whom together they provide with all its players) won the Burkina Faso African Nations Cup. Their players appear tired and rather too relaxed in their current round of African encounters. The first to start was Ismaili, playing the first-leg of its match in the preliminaries of the African Cup Winners Championship against Eritrea's champion, Red Sea. Although the match was played at home, they still seemed determined to make a meal of getting through to the 16th round.

Red Sea are an easy team, yet Ismaili still only drew 2-2 with them. Apparently unable to attack, they resorted to defence and soon forgot about scoring goals. The suspension of Mohamed Salah Abu-Greisha, their best striker, was also a blow. Having scored their first goal, Abu-Greisha was sent off before the end of the first half for striking Eritrea's players rather than the ball. This was one of the main reasons for his team's later desperate behaviour. Ismaili's second goal fell to Mohamed Fekry who equalised, though not before the fans had really begun to lay into the team.

Ismaili have made it easy for Red Sea, who have only to draw or win by one goal to qualify. They also have the advantage of playing the return leg on 4 April at home. Four hundred fans travelled from Eritrea to cheer their team on, and celebrated their draw with much dancing in the stadium.

Zamalek for their part suffered a strange defeat away to Kenya's Gor Mahia in the first leg of the 32nd round of the African League Winners Cup. Although Zamalek have always beaten Gor Mahia in the past, this was not an easy match for Zamalek. This difficulty seemed to be largely due to the reluctance of Zamalek's mid-fielders to play football — though they didn't seem to mind the Kenyans playing football without them. As a result, Gor Mahia kept up a steady attack and the burden fell on Zamalek's goalkeeper, Nader El-Sayed. Save for his sterling performance, Zamalek would have lost by 12 goals. As it is, they lost by one, which came in the 39th minute of the first half. In the second half, Zamalek's performance improved, but not enough for them to equalise.

After the match Ruud Kroll, technical manager of Zamalek, commented, "This is the lightest loss they could have inflicted on us. We will be able to win the second leg easily when we are at home." Hany Zada, head of the Zamalek delegation, commented, "Losing by one goal is not a bad result because even if we had drawn we would have to win in Cairo. I think we will have an easy job qualifying for the next round."

At least Ahli did a little better than Zamalek, with a 1-1 draw against Ethiopia's Coffee in their first-leg match in Addis Ababa in the preliminary rounds of the African League Winners Cup. Ahli were returning to Africa following a four-year absence with their sights set on a third African League Winners title. The 1982 and 1987 winners had quit continental competitions in protest at disciplinary measures taken by the African Football Confederation (CAF) against several players. Ethiopia's Coffee had struck eight goals past Saint Michael United of Seychelles in a preliminary tie. But goals were much harder to score against Ahli, whose defence includes such national players as Samir Kamouna and Mohamed Emara. Ahli's Hossam Hassan got the first goal in the 13th minute of the first half. Ahli were set to win, had it not been for a penalty awarded by the referee in the 5th minute of the second half. But Ahli has a good chance of clinching the second-leg match to be played in Cairo on 3 April.



AHLI'S indoor halls are the venue for the 13th African Volleyball Champions' Cup from 23 to 30 March. The nine teams taking part have been divided into two groups. Group One is made up of Egypt's Ahli, Kenya's Commercial Bank, Tunisia's Helal and Côte d'Ivoire's Asic. Group Two boasts last year's champions, Kenya's Bousta, as well as Algeria's Moulidia, the Seychelles' Royal, Angola's Augustus and Kenya's Pipe Lines. As for Ahli themselves, they have been taking part in a 10-day closed camp in Romania, where they have played a number of friendly matches, in preparation for this event. They are fired by the desire to win the cup and thus regain the title which they once monopolised for so long. *photo: Amr Gamal*

The 'can do' team

The word 'impossible' simply does not exist in the dictionaries of some unique athletes who dribbled and shot their way to a World Cup showing. Nashwa Abdel-Tawab reports on the victorious national wheel-chaired basketball team

Have you ever seen players who lay motionless on the ground after being fouled in a football match? They do so because they are either tired, want to waste time, want to be substituted or want to find an excuse for their poor performance. Now take a look at some other kinds of players who will have none of this.

If you haven't seen this latter type of athlete, here's what you've been missing. The national wheel-chaired basketball team made it to next October's World Cup in Australia after winning its African qualifying matches in Egypt.

Egypt came out on top of a group of six teams which played almost a week of playoff games at the Military Academy's Balloon Indoor Hall. Egypt won all its five matches, taking the maximum 10 points, thus qualifying for the cup for the first time. Its easiest match was definitely against Lebanon which was beaten by a whopping 111-17 margin. But the team had a much tougher time with Kuwait, defeating the Gulf state 53-42 in the dying minutes. Cheered on by mainly soldiers and officers at the Academy, Egypt went on to beat Algeria 68-41, Libya 54-38 and South Africa 65-43. Algeria came second with nine points followed by Kuwait with eight.

The handicapped team was formed more than two years ago. The players were chosen from the 12 clubs that play in the domestic league. Its road to victory started under the tutelage of coach Farouk Habib. But it wasn't a path strewn with roses mainly because of the lack of sufficient financial support. One of the problems encountered was the cost of wheelchairs. A wheelchair of the kind the players use costs up to LE12,000. Clubs aren't equipped with such wheelchairs and, as a result, during their two years of preparations, players used to share their wheels because the federation couldn't afford wheelchairs for all 14 players. The problem was solved with the help of a businessman who bought the team all the wheelchairs it needed just before the qualifiers.

Another problem was the difficulty in holding indoor training camps for the players, because of exorbitant fees demanded by hotels plus the players' lack of mobility. But the Military Academy graciously hosted the players on its own training grounds in their indoor hall.

With the problems out of the way, Nabil Salem, president of the Egyptian Handicapped Federation, officially submitted Egypt's candidature to host the African and Middle East qualifications for the upcoming World Cup in Sydney. To prepare for the cup, the team played in the Steckmaldefil Championship in England in 1996, notching third place, and also participated in the third Moroccan International Championship in 1997 where it did even better, placing first.

It is noteworthy that this is not the first outstanding achievement of the Handicapped Federation; it's the third — in only two months. First, the ringball team for blind players qualified for the World Cup in Spain. Then disabled volleyballers managed to advance to the World Cup in Iran.

After their remarkable achievement, several clubs honoured the disabled hoopers at lavish receptions but what all the players really wanted, and needed, was a deserved rest with their equally outstanding families. These athletes are men of action, not words. They never said they would win the cup; they just went out and did it.

The players, handicapped from accidents that could happen to anybody, have been able to prove that they are capable of victory. With long arms and sharp eyes, they were determined to achieve what to most people would be an impossible dream.

